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Teaching with a focus on self-esteem : an in-depth phenomenological interviewing study.

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TEACHING WITH A FOCUS ON SELF-ESTEEM: AN IN-DEPTH PHENOMENOLOGICAL INTERVIEWING STUDY

A Dissertation Presented

by

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ABSTRACT

TEACHING WITH A FOCUS ON SELF-ESTEEM:
AN IN-DEPTH PHENOMENOLOGICAL INTERVIEWING STUDY

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The purpose of this dissertation is to examine, explore, and describe the phenomenon of teaching with a focus on self-esteem, or teaching with a focus on the affective or psychological domain of development. This phenomenon is called humanistic education which is rooted in humanistic psychology, an American school of psychology that evolved in the middle of this century. Humanistic education is on the rise in educational institutions across the country because of a positive relationship between self-esteem and constructive learning and because of the growing self-esteem needs of our nation's children.

This study sought to gain a grounded understanding of the experience and significance assigned to the experience of teaching with a focus on self-esteem by learning from fifteen teachers who actually do teach

with such a focus. The qualitative method of in-depth phenomenological interviewing was employed. The data is presented in the form of narrated profiles of selected participants and in the form of key themes that comprise the phenomenon.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

Self-esteem improvement has become a common educational objective in schools across the nation [Bray, 1990; Leo, 1990]. The state of California has proposed legislation that "every school district in California should adopt the promotion of self-esteem and personal and social responsibility as a clearly stated goal, integrate self-esteem in its total curriculum, and inform all persons of its policies and operations" [California State Department of Education, 1990, p. 65]. Last year, the New York State Department of Education developed a state-level position to examine how New York State can institute a focus on self-esteem [Shipe, 1991].

While student self-esteem, or the psychological well-being of students may have always been of concern to the schools, there is a new emphasis on this concern. This new emphasis brings with it a new focus on the importance of the interpersonal relationship between the teacher and student and the emotional climate of the classroom. Teaching with a focus on

self-esteem is an approach to education called humanistic education.

Humanistic education is born out of humanistic psychology, an American branch of psychology that emerged after World War Two. Humanistic psychology is characterized by a belief in the value of the creative potential of every individual. According to humanistic psychology, every individual will realize and behave according to his/her potential if s/he is aware of his/her unique value or, if s/he has self-esteem. The self concept is the central construct of humanistic psychology and is understood as the critical factor of personality and human behavior [Branden, 1969 & 1987; Combs & Snygg, 1949; Fromm, 1947; Goldstein, 1939; Horney, 1950; Kelley, 1947; Maslow, 1954; Rogers, 1951].

While each self is inherently valuable, the individual becomes aware of his/her self within a particular social context and its particular, cultural system of meaning. S/he will learn to value or not value his/her self depending on the meaning attributed to human qualities in his/her particular social context. Social contexts can be synergistic to human

development or they can be stifling to human development.

Humanistic psychologists sought to promote psychological well-being by helping individuals to develop self-esteem. Consequently, humanistic psychology developed a social or political agenda. Humanistic psychology challenged our society to become a social context that would support self-esteem and human development. This political agenda as well as humanistic psychology's reverence for the individual became popularized in the 1960's. Humanistic psychology consciously provided a theoretical foundation for the social activism of that time which was marked by an anti-establishment, romantic, pro-individual sentiment. In some ways, this sentiment was actually contradictory to humanistic theory which recognized the social nature of the individual. Since then, the humanistic model has evolved as a force to transform and improve social institutions. In fact, humanistic theory can be seen as a part of our popular cultural consciousness and continues to challenge, permeate, and transform many of our social institutions.

This study will focus on the application of humanistic psychology to the institution of education,

humanistic education. The goal of humanistic education is to create a social context within which children can develop self-esteem and can realize their creative potential [Canfield & Siccone, 1991; Combs, 1961; Combs & Snygg, 1949; Rogers, 1969]. The humanistic approach assumes that if children have self-esteem, they will naturally be motivated to learn important skills and knowledge to be productive in their social context. Given that each teacher is unique, and that each student is unique, there is no one method that defines humanistic teaching. Thus, by nature humanistic teaching is a nebulous phenomenon.

The humanistic model of education challenges many of the traditional operations of our nation's schools as well as the traditional understanding of the role of the teacher which were born from a traditional model of education. The traditional model of education, as described by Johansen et al., 1982, focused on the acquisition of shared skills and knowledge as the primary purpose of the schools rather than the unique personal development of each child. The traditional model saw the teacher's primary role as delivering a given body of knowledge and skills; his/her focus was on cognitive or intellectual development.

The humanistic education movement criticized many traditional teaching practices as being detrimental to personal growth. The humanistic model has stimulated tremendous debate and a growing body of literature focusing on the relationship between the teacher, students' personal development, learning and ultimately, the purpose of education. The research strongly supports the humanistic assertions that self-esteem is fundamental to constructive learning and that teachers can influence self-esteem [Aspy, 1983; Coopersmith, 1967; Purkey, 1970; Silvernail, 1985].

It is no coincidence that concurrent to the growth of humanistic education and the humanistic movement at large was a growing awareness of and perhaps a growing danger of social and personal problems. Environmental pollution, the threat of nuclear war, oppression, loneliness, anonymity, apathy, crime, substance abuse and poverty have become part of daily life in our society. The effects of these problems on children no longer allow us the luxury of debating whether or not humanistic education belongs in the schools. Children are coming to school from conditions that are deleterious to their personal development [Childrens' Defense Fund, 1989; Dryfoos, 1990; Edelman, 1984; Elkind, 1982;

Postman, 1982]. Schools may be the only chance our society has to systematically help our needy children to cope with the social problems and to avoid the perpetuation of these problems.

The dismal state of childhood as well as the positive implications of the research on humanistic education have spurred the schools to institutionalize a focus on the personal well-being, or self-esteem of children. This new focus necessarily brings with it many changes in the operation of the schools. In many ways, the effort to institutionalize these changes seems paradoxical. It is a teacher's personal attitudes about his/her job, his/her students and about humanity that is key to humanistic teaching. How are the schools to institutionalize personal attitudes? Furthermore, there are many different teaching practices that could be considered humanistic education. These practices evolve within a real relationship between teacher and student. By definition, humanistic education is individualized. How is the school to institutionalize individual relationships? How is the quality of education to be monitored? Perhaps most ironic is the fact that the humanistic approach tacitly obfuscates many traditional institutional practices.

Until now, most of the research has examined the effects of various practices that embody the humanistic approach on children. There is very little information about the experience of teaching with a humanistic approach. What is it like for teachers to have a primary focus on self-esteem and the personal, psychological development of their students within the larger bureaucratic structure of the traditional institution of school? What are the individual as well as common practices, dynamics, issues, motivations, ramifications of such an approach? What are the necessary skills and how does a teacher develop these skills? How does the humanistic teacher meet the individual personal growth needs of each student and still teach to a whole class of children? How does s/he integrate the need to teach mandated, common knowledge and skills with his/her focus on each child's unique interests, readiness and style? What meaning does the experience of teaching for self-esteem have for teachers, the institution of school, and society at large?

This dissertation offers an understanding of the professional role of the humanistic elementary school teacher, or the job of teaching with a primary focus on the personal development and self-esteem of children,

grounded in the experiences of teachers who have actually made an effort to teach with such a focus. If we can learn more about what it is like to be a humanistic teacher, then we can better institutionalize this role of the teacher in education.

The qualitative research method of in-depth phenomenological interviewing was employed for this study. Fifteen teachers from the northeastern part of the country were interviewed. Participants were sought from public school systems in urban, suburban, and rural areas in order to represent a broad range of experiences. The common denominator of the participants is their conscious effort to incorporate a primary focus on self-esteem into their teaching practices.

Interviews were taped and transcribed verbatim; interview protocols were analyzed with a focus on the themes that emerged as central to the experience of teaching with a focus on self-esteem development. The data is presented in the form of narrated stories of the teacher-participants. The presentation takes two forms; one is the form of individual profiles of three teachers and the other is the form of themes that emerged as significant in many of the interviews.

A. Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this dissertation is to offer understanding of the phenomenon of humanistic education, or the experience and meaning made of teaching with a primary focus on self-esteem in public schools. A greater understanding of teachers' experiences will offer new information about the dynamics and ramifications of this phenomenon. In the past, humanistic education has been studied in terms of the effects of such an effort on students. This study provides a new perspective by offering an understanding of the teachers' point of view.

B. Clarification and Delimitation

This section will identify my assumptions as a researcher. I shall define the central terms of this study as I, the researcher, conceive of them. This section of the dissertation is intended to demarcate the intent of the study.

1. Personal Assumptions

As a human being, I make no claim to having conducted this research as an unbiased investigator. I have strong feelings about the institutionalization

of humanistic education in our schools. I believe that schools must educate in the realm of personal development. The reasons for my belief are as follows:

1) There is a significant body of research that suggests the benefits of humanistic education, both to children's personal well-being and to their learning. I shall refer to this research later in the dissertation.

2) Children are increasingly living in conditions that inhibit their personal development; schools may be the best way to counter this problem.

3) Personal intelligence, as discussed by Howard Gardner [1983], is important, has been under recognized, and should be formally addressed in schools. Gardner identifies seven types of human intelligence: linguistic, musical, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. The last two comprise personal intelligence. Humanistic education addresses the personal types of intelligence.

4) Humanistic education as a model grants the teacher a high level of autonomy and considers the profession of teaching to be deserving of high social status. This is in contrast to the traditional model

of the teacher as servant of larger bureaucratic structures such as the state or school district. I believe that human nature is such that people are more likely to be constructive when they have power over their own conduct than when they are following directives from an external source.

My personal assumptions about the value of humanistic education have motivated my research efforts. The goal of this study is to offer a better understanding of the dynamics of the actual lived experience of the humanistic teaching style within the institution of schools. I feel that my personal bias has only fueled my enthusiasm. If we can learn about the dynamics of this phenomenon as experienced by teachers in the schools, then we can more effectively guide the purposeful development of meaningful practices. I entered this research with no agenda as to what kinds of practices might or might not be effective. I truly wanted to learn from teachers about what works and how it works. I wanted to learn from teachers if the current structure of school even accommodates the humanistic approach.

I built in strategies as I designed this study to check the influence of my personal feelings as I

conducted the research. These strategies will be explained in the "Research Methods" section of this dissertation.

2. Terms

The focus of this study is on a phenomenon that is by definition a nebulous phenomenon. Humanistic education takes shape within a real, lived relationship between a teacher and student. Humanistic teaching involves the teacher's personal belief that each student has a unique and valuable potential and that his/her job is to help the student realize his/her unique potential.

As will be explained later in this dissertation, in theory, the realization of individual potential depends on the individual's sense of self-esteem. Thus, self-esteem is the focus of the humanistic approach. Like "humanistic education," "self-esteem" is a nebulous phenomenon, because of the abstract nature of the concept of "self." Many have written about the difficulty of defining terms when focusing on self-concept. [For more detailed discussion see, Beane, 1985; Covington, 1989; Moustakas, 1956; Wylie, 1961 & 1974.]

Teaching with a focus on self-concept involves a focus on the affective domain, or the personal development of students as well as the cognitive development of students. "Humanistic education," "teaching with a focus on self-esteem," "affective education," and "focusing on the personal development of students" are all terms that will be used interchangeably throughout this dissertation. The "Background of Study" section will show how and why the terms are used synonymously.

3. Exclusions

This study is not intended to evaluate the effects of teaching with a focus on self-esteem. I have learned about many different practices that teachers employ in their efforts. I have no intention of judging these practices. My purpose is to gain and offer an understanding of this phenomenon grounded in both the individual and common experiences of creating such a phenomenon.

I do not expect to present a full representation of different practices that make up the phenomenon of teaching with a primary focus on self-esteem. I intend to offer a representation of what it is like to teach with such a focus within the institution of public,

elementary schools. While I am interested in the kinds of practices employed, I am most interested in understanding the experience and meaning of teaching with a primary focus on the personal development of students.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND OF STUDY

The growing emphasis on humanistic education in our nation's schools rests on the theoretical foundation of humanistic psychology. A discussion of this branch of psychology, and a discussion of the evolution of humanistic education will illuminate the phenomenon of the increasing emphasis on humanistic education. This section of the dissertation will provide a background for this study. A review of the related literature is embedded throughout this section.

A. Humanistic Psychology

Humanistic psychology emerged in this country in the 1940's and 1950's as a number of psychologists sought to understand and promote human well-being and healthy human development. These pioneers found that traditional psychology, (dominated by Freud's pessimistic psychoanalysis and Watson's mechanistic behaviorism) which was based on the study of human pathology, could not accommodate their focus. Abraham Maslow [1970], (often considered the leader of humanistic psychology) explains that humanistic psychology origin-

ally sought to supplement traditional psychology but the humanistic approach inherently challenged many of the basic ontological and epistemological assumptions of traditional psychology. Humanistic psychology focuses on the consciousness of human beings and considers man to be an active creature rather than a determined, reactive organism. Furthermore, humanistic psychology assumes that reality is primarily a subjective experience.

Humanistic psychology continues to accept many of the tenets of the traditional schools; however, humanistic psychology grew to become an autonomous branch of psychology with the incorporation of The Association of Humanistic psychology in 1960. The humanistic branch of psychology is regularly referred to as the "third force" in psychology throughout the literature.

The third force is not a single body of theory but a convergence of a number of lines and schools of thought with the common belief in the constructive, creative potential of human nature, and the common desire to understand, address, and guide individual human behavior based on this belief. Essentially humanistic psychologists are identified by their identification with a paradigm of human well-being and

growth as a psychological model. Thus, the goal of humanistic psychology is to help all people "be all they can be" rather than the traditional goal of fixing psychologically unhealthy people. Humanistic psychology brings psychology to the common person.

The humanistic psychologists developed a model of human development and behavior based on the idea that each individual is born with a unique potential for creative, constructive interaction with the world. The individual and his/her unique potential life force or his/her self, is the central construct of humanistic psychology.

This construct of self is abstract and abstruse; as described by Clark Moustakas [1956] in his often cited essay on the self: "The self is not definable in words.....The self can only be experienced....The self is itself alone existing as a totality and constantly emerging. It can be understood only as a unique personal experience" [p. 7]. The nebulous process of the emergence of each creative life force, of each constructive potential, or of each self is the focus and goal of humanistic psychology.

This process of becoming one's potential is referred to as "self-actualization" [Combs & Snygg,

1949; Goldstein, 1939; Maslow, 1954] or "self-realization," [Fromm, 1941; Horney, 1950] or "fully functioning," [Rogers, 1951]. Maslow [1971] describes the process of self-actualization as "the capacity and the tendency, latent if not evident, to move forward....The goal the individual most wants to achieve, the end which he knowingly and unknowingly pursues, is to continually become oneself....(self-actualization is) the tendency to express and activate all the creative capacities of the self to the extent that such actualization enhances the self" [p. 35 & 108]. Humanistic psychologists are identified by their belief that behaving in ways that actualize the individual's unique creative self, characterizes human well-being.

Self actualizing people are the epitome of constructive, healthy people. Maslow [1971] described self-actualizing people as enjoying a more efficient perception of reality, a high degree of acceptance (of self, others, circumstances), spontaneity, the ability to see and plan on larger horizons, a continued freshness of appreciation for life, a self-governing nature, involvement in deep interpersonal relationships and self-enhancing peak experiences. Rogers [1951] adds to this description the quality of consciously

understanding one's life and life in general as a process.

Collectively, a group of self-actualizing people would also be the epitome of social well-being. Self actualizing behavior is by nature pro-social. Roger's [1961] explains, "the basic nature of the human being, when functioning freely, is constructive and trustworthy....When we are able to free the individual of defensiveness, so that he is open to the wide range of his own needs, as well as a wide range of environmental and social demands, his reactions may be trusted to be positive, forward moving, constructive. We do not need to ask who will socialize him, for one of his own deepest needs is for affiliation and communication with others. As he becomes more fully himself, he will become more realistically socialized" [pp. 194].

The individual needs to belong to a larger than existential-self, social context in order to become fully human; to become him/herself; to behave in self-actualizing ways. For all intensive purposes, s/he cannot exist within humanity unless s/he at one time belonged to a social context.[1] Thus, the healthy

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[1] It is through freak accidents in history that we know of human beings who grew up not within a human context. There is the nineteenth century case of

individual is naturally motivated to be constructive and productive in his/her social context as this helps his/her own growth. Conversely, s/he would only hurt him/herself by being destructive in his/her social context.

An individual life force, or creative potential takes a human form within the system of meaning of a particular social context. While, theoretically, the creative potential of the individual is inherently constructive and valuable to human development, the individual does not automatically behave in self-actualizing ways. The individual's behavior is modified by the way s/he understands what it means to be a human being. This understanding is born out of a particular social context. S/he will learn what it means to be human by how s/he is treated and by how s/he sees human being modeled. S/he will only under-

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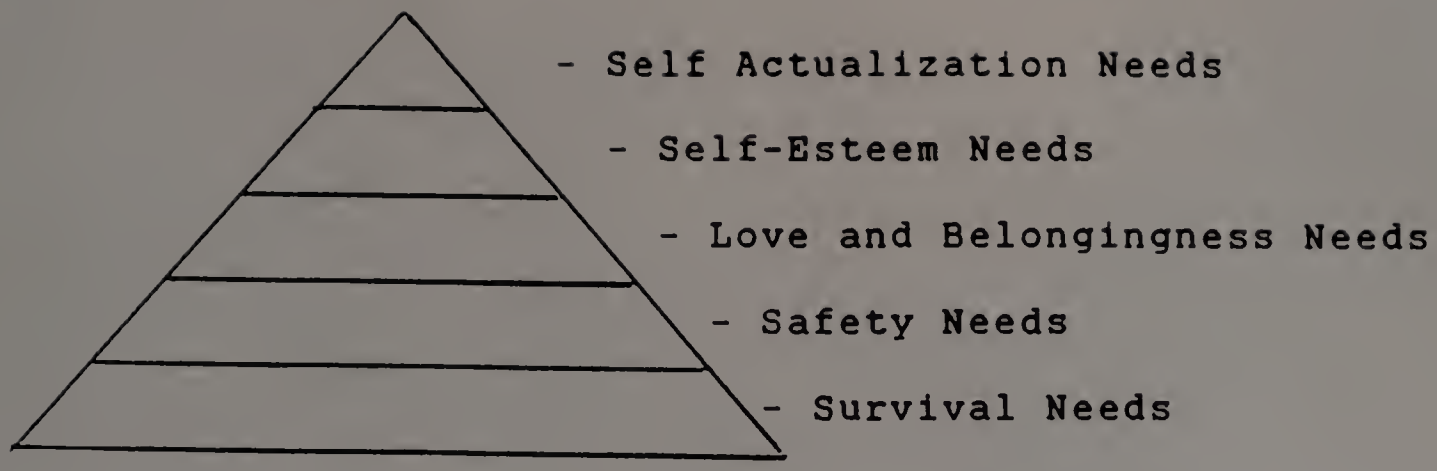
Victor found running wild in the woods and the twentieth century case of Genie, a horrendously abused and neglected girl. Both children were around thirteen when found and their lack of human interaction in their formative years left both severely retarded and without access to the realm of human possibilities for productivity, [deVilliers & deVilliers, 1979]. Though Victor and Genie grew physically, they did not develop as human beings. They did not develop capacities that we assume to be uniquely characteristic of human beings--i.e., language, sophisticated intellect, ability to relate interpersonally, self-control.

stand him/herself in terms of his/her unique, creative, potential if human potential (his/her own and in general) is understood as a valuable human form within his/her social context. Only when the individual learns to understand his/her creative potential as valuable will s/he naturally actualize his/her creative potential in his/her behavior [Combs & Snygg, 1949; Maslow, 1954 & 1970, 1962; May, 1953; Rogers, 1951]. Thus, self-esteem is the critical factor of human well-being [Rogers, 1961, describes self-esteem as not only valuing one's self as understood in social terms, but also "trusting one's organism" or inner experiences in directing one's behavior. However, this trust must also be learned to be accepted as valid within a social context].

Maslow's [1954 & 1970, 1962, 1971] best known construct, his "Hierarchy of Human Needs" is widely accepted as a definitive model of humanistic psychology. This model clarifies the humanistic perspective of human development and behavior and shows the significance of self-esteem to self actualizing behavior. Figure 1. is a picture of Maslow's model.



Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Figure 1.

According to this model, every individual's behavior can be understood as satisfying the individual's "drive" to become a self-actualizing, creative person. The need for self-actualization, however, is the highest order, human need. The individual must satisfy his/her lower order needs first. The lowest order need is the need for survival, the need to eat, sleep, and to have shelter. If an individual is hungry, s/he will behave in such a way to satisfy the need to eat. Next is the need for safety, both physical and psychological. These lower order needs are basic needs that satisfy the physical organism.

After safety, is the need for love and belongingness. Once the individual's physical living needs are met, s/he then needs belongingness to a social context,

to provide a structure or form for his/her creative potential. However, the individual does not only need to belong to take shape, the individual needs to feel loved and valued by others in order to learn to love and value him/herself.

Erich Fromm [1947] offers a definition of love that captures Maslow's meaning of love: "Genuine love is an expression of productiveness and implies care, respect, responsibility and knowledge. It is not an affect in the sense of being affected by someone, but an active striving for the growth and happiness of the loved person" [pp. 66].

When the individual has satisfied the need for love and belongingness--the paradoxical need to: 1) belong to a larger group or to be the same as others, and 2) to be recognized as a unique, valuable and creative individual within that group, then s/he has the need to value and recognize his/her own unique potential. S/he has the need to establish a sense of self-esteem. (Many, including Fromm, have suggested that only with self-esteem can a person "genuinely love" another person. As May [1953] explains, "....(man's) consciousness of himself, ...is the basis of his capacity to orient himself in life" [pp. 28].

The individual will relate to other human beings based on his/her self-understanding. Rogers [1961] states that self-esteem brings with it "species esteem.")

Once the individual is at the level of satisfying his/her need for self-esteem, then s/he will have reached the need to consciously behave in ways that actualize his/her unique creative potential within his/her social context, or ways that express his/her self. Self-actualizing behavior is the epitome of constructive human development.

Maslow, as well as the other humanists, were well aware that the humanistic model was an ideal model. According to Maslow, a human being can never be fully self-actualized because life is a continually developing process. Nevertheless, humanistic theory assumes that all people have the capacity to be self-actualizing. To this end, the humanistic psychologists sought to promote social contexts that were synergistic to human development.

Ironically, humanistic psychology, with the ultimate focus on the value of individual creative potential, and on the power of self-esteem, is fundamentally a social psychology. The application of humanistic psychology necessarily involves developing

social contexts that value individual differences and supports personal development. As Rogers [1974] explains, "The individual has within himself vast resources for self-understanding, for altering his self-concept, his attitudes, and his behavior--and these resources can be tapped if only a definable climate of facilitative psychological attitudes can be provided" [pp. 116].

As Maslow is largely credited as the pioneer of humanistic theory, Rogers is largely credited with applying the humanistic model to the practice of psychology. Rogers devoted his life's work to this task and he developed a humanistic model of therapy, or more precisely, what he calls the person-centered method of counseling [1942, 1951]. The humanistic psychologist does not "cure" the "patient" -- s/he provides a relationship within which the "client" learns to value and to thereby become his/her self [Rogers preferred the term "client" over the traditional term "patient." This semantic difference illustrates the departure of the humanistic approach from the traditional approach, though the term "client" is not without its own "baggage"].

Rogers [1957] identified four critical characteristics of a psychologically facilitative relationship: 1) empathy; 2) congruence; 3) unconditional positive regard; and 4) genuineness. The humanistic psychologist provides a loving human relationship (i.e. recognizes and responds to the client's creative life force) within which the client can experience social esteem, (love and belongingness) for his/her unique human potential. This experience helps the client to realize his/her own unique, potential. Theoretically, any loving relationship could be therapeutic. The humanistic model challenges the authority and power that were attributed to traditional psychology and traditional methods of psychotherapy.

In many ways, humanistic psychology revolutionized the field of psychology. This revolution can be seen as a microcosm of the effects of humanistic psychology in our society at large. Rogers [1977] suggests that humanistic psychology "has gone to the root of many of the concepts and values of our culture and has brought about a complete or marked change in many principles and procedures. Most notably, it has altered the thinking about power and control between persons and within institutions" [pp. xii].

The focus of humanistic psychology evolved from a focus on individual creative potential (40's, 50's, early 60's) to a focus on the relationship between the individual and society. The 1960's and much of the 1970's were marked by a very anti-establishment focus. From the mid 1970's to the present, the focus has matured to embrace the possibility of a synergistic relationship between a social structure and the individual.[2] This evolution of focus is illustrated by the changes in the operating principles of the Association of Humanistic Psychology from 1961 to 1988 (See Appendix A). The humanistic movement now actively seeks not just to foster individual development but also to foster social development.

As the field of humanistic psychology evolved, so did the painful recognition that our society did not promote healthy human behavior. The humanistic psychologists were fueled by their perception of how "unwell" many Americans were. Most of the humanistic psychologists indicted our fast-paced, technological, materialistic, bureaucratic mass society as dehumaniz-

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[2] Certainly, theoretically, the spectrum of focuses can be seen throughout the years. However, this chronological shift in focus represents the evolving focus of the literature and voice of those times.

ing and the cause of individual and social problems. May [1970] expresses the humanistic sentiment, (the individual's) "problem of identity in the 1950's has now become, more specifically, the crisis of the loss of a sense of significance" [pp. 26]. It is difficult for the individual to feel as if s/he matters, or to feel "social esteem" in our increasingly massive society.

In the 1960's, the humanistic model became popularized as it served as a theoretical foundation for the social activism that shaped our culture at that time. This popularization of humanistic psychology has remained a significant idea in our mass culture. The proliferation of personal growth literature, organizations, and encounter groups continues to strengthen a cultural awareness of humanistic ideas about human development.

Ferguson [1981] and Rogers [1977] both chronicle the humanistic changes in the institutions of medicine, business, politics, and education that have developed since the 1960's. Many refer to the transformational influence of the humanistic model on our social institutions as a "new age of humanity" [Ferguson, 1980; Gawain, 1986]. According to these "new agers," we have

arrived at a time in humanity where our way of living must become more supportive of human development; they warn that the humanistic transformation is critical if we are to avoid human extinction. The growth and influence of the humanistic model perhaps can be understood as the ability of the humanistic model to address this growing awareness of and perhaps a growing seriousness of social problems. Humanistic psychology offers hope.

The growing influence of the humanistic model in our society is epitomized by the growing popular focus on the issue of self-esteem; the central concept of humanistic psychology. In 1986, a National Council on self-esteem was formed. The council reports consistently increasing membership; in 1989, the council launched two new chapters a month throughout the nation [Adams, 1990]. This issue of self-esteem has even become the business of our government.

In California, a state task force was organized in 1987 called the "California Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem and Personal and Social Responsibility." The formation and purpose of the task force was based on the premise of humanistic psychology that poor self-esteem is the root cause of personal and social prob-

lems. The final report, "Toward a State of Esteem" recommends strategies for social institutions to adopt to help facilitate the development of self-esteem for California residents [California State Department of Education, 1990]. Six other states have proposed legislation to organize similar task forces in order to address increasing social problems [Jakin, 1991; National Council on Self-Esteem, 1991]. Furthermore, Senator Claiborne Pell has introduced legislation to create a National Commission on Self-esteem [National Council on Self-Esteem, 1991].

A growing influence of the humanistic model in our educational institutions can also be seen by the growing focus on the issue of self-esteem in our nation's schools. Educational journalist for the New York Times, Rosemary L. Bray [1990] writes, "The debate over whether children's feelings about themselves can make a difference in their academic achievement has found its way into every level of education" [p. 33]. Rita Kramer reports that self-esteem was the top concern in 20 elementary schools that she visited around the country [Leo, 1990].

This focus on self-esteem in the schools can be seen from coast to coast. One of the nine strategies

recommended by the California State Task Force was to integrate a focus on self-esteem as a primary mission of the California public schools. The New York Board of Regents included self-esteem as one of ten educational goals in the 1984 statement of purpose which continues to guide the New York State schools [New York State Department of Education, 1984].

As in our society at large, an increased emphasis on the application of the humanistic model to education (or, on self-esteem, and personal, psychological development) can be understood as a response to our growing awareness of and perhaps the growing seriousness of social problems and the impact of these problems on our nation's children.

B. Humanistic Education

Like humanistic psychology, humanistic education does not represent a single body of theory, but instead a convergence of ideas and thoughts with a common focus on the application of the humanistic model of human development and behavior to education. These humanistic ideas were not new to education. French philosopher Rousseau [1762] describes the teacher's job as nurturing the unfolding human potential of the child.

Swiss educator, Pestalozzi [1801] focuses on the importance of the personal relationship between teacher and student and the necessity of focusing on personal experience in education.[3] Silberman [1970] writes about how Horace Mann tried to shape our schools based on these child centered models as early as 1842 but "the school men would have none of that." Silberman paraphrases their objections, "...To make learning pleasurable would be to destroy the habits of discipline and obedience the schools were intended to foster" [p. 59]. The child centered model seemed incongruent with the original notion of school as an institution for equal socialization.

In the early 20th century, John Dewey [1916] led the progressive movement in education, which denied that a child centered approach was incongruent with the goal of developing an educated populace. The progressive model recognized the holistic and unique nature of the child and sought to build on students' personal interests. The progressive model, like the humanistic model, questions the traditional view that

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[3] While these educators can be seen as humanistic, and as an important foundation, 20th century American humanistic education can still be seen as distinct with its unique focus on self-esteem.

there is a fixed body of important skills and knowledge. The teacher's ability to engage students is recognized as an important part of his/her job. Still, the purpose of education is focused on the goal of intellectual or cognitive growth of the child [Dewey, 1938].

Humanistic education builds on the foundation of progressive education. Humanistic education is also distinct in many ways: there is a unique primary focus on the psychological domain of development; a focus on the value of individual creative potential; a belief that self-esteem is the core of personality and behavior; and the belief that the teacher's ability to facilitate the development of self-esteem is the most significant part of his/her job. The humanistic education movement, developing hand-in-hand with humanistic psychology, ultimately sought to make school a social context that was synergistic to healthy human development or self-actualization.

Historically, the self concept and personal development of students can be seen as an explicit concern of our schools as early as 1918 [Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education, 1918]. However, this concern was not a primary concern.

Educational historian Diane Ravitch [1985] explains that personal development was a secondary consideration of the schools. The primary consideration was the transmission and development of skills and knowledge. The personal development of children was the primary business of family and church, but not a primary concern of the schools. In many ways, the constitutional separation of church and state precludes the school's focus on personhood. This is not to say that teachers did not address the personal development of students, only they did not recognize personal development as a primary and explicit focus of their profession.[4] Instead, the primary role of the teacher was to help children to develop into productive members of our society or into productive "social beings."

In contrast, the primary role of the humanistic teacher would be to provide a psychologically facilitative relationship with students. Jerslid [1952] suggests that the professional role of "teacher" be redefined as "teacher/psychologist" because the teacher for better or worse necessarily has a profound psychological influence on the personhood of children. As he

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[4] Actually, I am quite sure that the significant quality of good teaching has always been the ability of the teacher to personally engage with his/her students.

explains, "Every teacher is in his own way a psychologist. Everything he does, says, or teaches has or could have a psychological impact. What he offers helps children to discover their resources and their limitations. He is the central figure in countless situations which can help the learned to realize and accept himself or which may bring humiliation, shame, rejection and self-disparagement" [p. 125].

According to the humanistic model, if teachers love their students, (as Fromm defines love) the students will develop self-esteem. Children with high self-esteem will naturally be motivated to learn significant skills and knowledge. This model assumes that each child has a valuable, unique creative potential and a unique learning style.

Many of the early proponents of humanistic education suggested that "significant skills and knowledge" are relative. Each child will learn an individualized configuration of skills and knowledge [Holt, 1972; Kozol,1972; Leonard, 1968; Rogers, 1969]. Furthermore, the teacher is not only concerned with the development of skills and knowledge. The teacher is concerned with the growth and development of the creative potential of each child. S/he is concerned primarily with the

psychological or affective domains of development, because with self-esteem, (and species-esteem) the child will naturally flourish in the other domains and be a productive, constructive member of society.

Each teacher will also have a unique way of humanistic teaching. As Rogers [1969] explains, "Humanistic education cannot be reduced to a model or technique. It is an attitude embodying a respect for the integrity and worth of persons; it is a way of seeing and relating to the world and others" [p. 42]. By definition, humanistic teaching is a nebulous phenomenon, taking shape within a real relationship between teacher and student, led by the teacher.

Theoretically, the humanistic teacher has much more power to decide the what and how of education than the traditional teacher. Along with this power also comes new responsibilities. The humanistic teacher must him/herself be a self-actualizing person. S/he must be skilled and knowledgeable in human development and facilitating personal growth. The humanistic teacher must believe in the value of individual creative potential, be aware of his/her own personal growth and must work on his/her own self-esteem [Greenberg, 1969; Jerslid, 1951; Jourard, 1964; Kelley, 1962;

Moustakas, 1959; Rogers, 1951, 1969]. After all, the teacher can only appreciate human potential if s/he appreciates his/her own.

Like the humanistic movement at large, during the 1960's the humanistic education movement aligned with the counterculture. The humanistic education movement sought to expose and transform the dehumanizing operations of our nation's schools. Held up in comparison to the humanistic model, the schools were denounced as detrimental social contexts that damage and destroy children's creative potential [Combs, 1961; Farber, 1969; Goodman, 1962; Holt, 1964, 1972; Illich, 1970; Kozol, 1967; Rogers, 1969]. The critics viewed teacher-student relationships as adversarial; institutional operations as designed to train children, modify their nature and squelch their self-esteem; and knowledge and skills taught as irrelevant. The title of Farber's book, Student As Nigger, [1969] captures the sentiment of this genre. Combs [1971] shares a comprehensive list of the institutional practices that were considered dehumanizing (See Appendix B). The list was developed by the Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Many critics of our schools suggested that any adult directed activity would be oppressive to children and that compulsory education should be abolished altogether. They believed that all learning could best occur informally and suggested that any caring adult could adequately love a child and motivate him/her to learn and grow in his/her environment. However, adults can only help children learn to the extent of their own education. An illiterate parent cannot teach his/her child to read. Certainly reading is a significant skill for all children and is necessary to establish a sense of belongingness in our society.

The early humanistic movement at large, and the humanistic education movement particularly in the late 1960's, focused on individual growth in isolation from any influence of a social context. As discussed earlier, this focus was actually counter to the humanistic model. Individual creative potential and self-esteem can only develop within limits from a social context [Coopersmith, 1967; May, 1975].

As Silberman [1970] suggests...."to pretend that a teacher's job is to let the child follow his own interests and develop his own talents and capacities without imposition of any adult values is, in fact, to

prevent the child from realizing his own nature. For the child is not an atom freely floating about without any relationship to the adult world; he is a part of that world, with its values, its past and its present" [pp. 239]. The child needs the structure of a social context within which to take a meaningful human form.

The early humanistic educators saw the job of humanistic educator as one and the same as the job of humanistic psychologist. However, the job of the teacher is larger than providing a love and belongingness within an interpersonal relationship. The humanistic teacher also helps children to feel belongingness to a larger social context. Rogers [1961] admits that his original understanding of humanistic education didn't quite feel right. He states, "...our formulation of the process of facilitating learning in education is not nearly as accurate or complete as our formulations regarding the therapeutic process" [p. 298]. Changes in his second edition of Freedom to Learn [1983] imply that he grew to accept that the humanistic teacher does, indeed, structure learning to some extent.

As the humanistic movement, at large, evolved to recognize that the individual's need for belongingness

is connected to having responsibilities to and in and for a social context, the humanistic education movement evolved from a focus on denouncing the institution of schools as inherently damaging to human growth to a focus on how the schools could become more synergistic to healthy human growth. Ultimately, humanistic education involves a balance between helping children realize their unique creative potentials and helping them realize how their unique creative potential fits into the larger social context. Theoretically, each teacher would need to find this balance for each child. Much of the current literature on teaching with a focus on self-esteem includes a focus on the issue of social responsibility [Canfield and Siccone, 1991; Glenn and Nelson, 1989; Lepage, 1987].

In 1969, Mario Fantini and Gerald Weinstein added a new dimension to the humanistic approach. They suggested that humanistic teaching need not be such a nebulous phenomenon and that there may indeed be an appropriate methodology for humanistic education. With the support of a Ford Foundation grant, they developed a curriculum model to formally teach children to develop a positive self-concept. The personal human

development of students and the social context of the classroom were content areas for formal instruction.

Fantini and Weinstein did not intend to replace an overall humanistic approach (i.e. loving relationship between teacher and student), nor to replace "normal content areas." The affective curriculum was intended to be added to the regular curriculum. The objective was to provide a planned learning experience for children to "encounter" their selves and their behavior. They would formally be taught to value their selves within the social context of the classroom. Furthermore, Weinstein & Fantini suggested that personal experiences could be used as content to stimulate the learning of traditional skills and knowledge.

Many different humanistic or affective curricula have been developed since Fantini and Weinstein's work. Some of the more popular include: The Magic Circle Series [Bessell, 1972]; Project Self-Esteem [Bielen & McDaniel, 1986]; Esteem Builders [Borba, 1989]; D.U.S.O. [Dinkmeyer, 1970]; 100 Ways to Enhance Self-Concept in the Classroom [Canfield & Wells, 1974]; Building Self-Esteem [Reasoner, 1982]; Responsibility, A Curriculum to Promote Success and Self-Esteem [Siccone, 1987]. Like Weinstein and Fantini's curriculum,

these curricula are designed to provide children with successive learning experiences that will help them to think about their selves (and each other) in more positive ways, will provide the experience of being valued within the classroom social context, and will help them to be more aware of their behavior. (The more recent curricula focus more on the issue of social responsibility than the earlier ones.)

As evident by the introductions to almost every one of these curricula, they are intended to serve as resources to teachers who approach teaching with a humanistic attitude. However, the existence of affective curricula make it possible for any teacher to try to address self-esteem. This truth adds new questions to the issue of humanistic education. Can any teacher teach children to have self-esteem by using a self-esteem curriculum? Theoretically, only a teacher with a humanistic attitude could help students develop self-esteem.

While focusing on student self-esteem is ultimately in the hands of individual teachers, it is becoming more and more an issue that is being addressed at the institutional level. The issue of self-esteem

is enjoying a central place in educational policy, nationwide.

There is an enormous body of literature and research focusing on both the relationship between self-esteem and learning and the effects of teacher behaviors on student self-esteem. [For extensive reviews of the literature see Aspy, 1983; Kash & Borich, 1978; Gergen, 1971; Purkey, 1970; Silvernail, 1987; Walberg & Uguroglu, 1980; Wylie, 1961 & 1974]. The literature suggests that, indeed, self-esteem and learning are positively correlated and that teachers do have a significant influence on student self-esteem.

However, the research is considered largely inconclusive. There are many different definitions of the abstract concepts of self and self-esteem, many different ways to measure self-esteem, many different ideas about what constitutes meaningful learning and psychological well-being, and many different teaching practices designed to improve self-esteem. Thus, any one study can only speak about the variables as they were defined within that study. Furthermore, it is possible that the variables, as defined in any one study, are not even the significant variables. For example, it is common for the studies that examine the

effects of a particular curriculum to not address the overall interpersonal relationship between student and teacher. This is unfortunate because the relationship and overall emotional climate of the classroom are probably more significant than the curriculum. It is likely that a curriculum's effect on this more nebulous variable is the critical factor of success or failure in those studies.

It is not only because of the research that schools are focusing on self-esteem. Students are coming to school with tremendous personal needs; our nation's children are growing up in deleterious social conditions that do not support the development of self-esteem. They are learning how to behave destructively only to expand and perpetuate the problem. Schools may be the only avenue to systematically address the personal needs of children and to help them grow to be constructive, productive adults. We really no longer have the luxury to debate whether or not humanistic education belongs in the schools.

The psychological climate of our massive, technological, materialistic, bureaucratic society is interfering with the healthy development of our nation's children. It is difficult for many children

to develop a sense of significance or belongingness in their fast-paced, fragmented lives. Elkind [1981] writes about how children are being pushed to fit into their parents' busy schedules and pushed to "succeed." Furthermore, he warns that by raising children to fit into predetermined adult ideas and a complex society, rather than by nurturing them to become their selves, we are raising children to be mentally ill.

Neil Postman [1982] discussed how television, the primary companion of children, is a negative influence on children. Television exposes children to many models of human behavior that are beyond their developmental level of understanding. Postman focuses on the negative effects of violence in particular. Children learn to understand human being as violent and destructive, rather than creative and constructive, and behave accordingly. Furthermore, television's images of human being serve as a social context for children. These images do not validate the viewer's existence, let alone his/her unique potential. (Commercials actually sell products by making people feel "not O.K." without them.)

Joy Dryfoos [1990] writes that while all children are at some risk of damaged development in our society,

some children are at more serious risk of developing destructive behavior patterns (such as drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, school drop-out, delinquency) than others.

Dryfoos points out that poverty is a primary risk factor, often connected to or exacerbating other risk factors. Children are the nation's fastest growing segment of our population in poverty. 35% of all families with young children are poor. One in five children lives in poverty [Children's Defense Fund, 1989].

James Comer, a psychologist at Yale University has written extensively about how schools need to address the psychological development of children in order to enable them to learn. He states, "Given increasing divorce rates, the growing number of single parent families and families in which both parents work and the general complexity of modern life, even children of well-educated middle class parents can come to school unprepared because of the stress their families are undergoing. Such conditions often lead to frustration, disappointment, apathy, withdrawal, anger, and acting out on the part of the student....Schools that serve the poor and minority groups, however, have even

greater difficulties" [1986, pp. 444]. Comer suggests that the traditional methods of school seek to deliver a body of skills and knowledge to children that are derived from the perspective of the experience of the dominant culture. This is not congruent with the needs of many school children. Not only are our nation's children growing poorer but by the year 2030, almost half of our own nation's children will be from minority groups [Children's Defense Fund, 1989]. Comer has developed a successful model of education that uses a child's personal experience as a foundation for learning.

The schools have no choice but to systematically plan for the psychological reality and needs of our nation's children. Jerslid's hope to change the role of teacher/psychologist has become a necessity. Many children do not have enough adults in their lives who help them to develop self-esteem. However, institutionalizing a focus on student self-esteem in the work of the teacher is difficult.

Teaching for the personal development or the self-esteem of students is a nebulous phenomenon involving the attitude of an individual teacher.

Furthermore, the humanistic approach demands changes in many of the traditional operations of the schools.

Theoretically, the critical factor of humanistic teaching, the real relationship that develops between an individual teacher and student, cannot be concretely defined and mandated. If the schools hope to plan for and institutionalize a focus on the self-esteem of students, then it is critical to develop a greater qualitative understanding of the phenomenon of teaching with a focus on self-esteem. It is necessary to know not only the kinds of teacher behavior that constitute a humanistic approach but also what it is like to teach with such an approach within the institution of schools.

Learning about the experience of teachers who practice and create the phenomenon of humanistic education provides a grounded understanding of both teacher practices and the ramifications of the humanistic approach for the institution of school.

C. Significance of Study

This study is significant because it provides insight to the phenomenon of teaching with a focus on the self-esteem and the personal development of chil-

dren. This phenomenon is some what of an anomaly to the profession of teaching. Humanistic teaching requires a personal relationship between teacher and student. The humanistic approach also suggests changing the distribution of power and control of decisions in the institution of education, offering a greater share to teachers and students and a lesser share to the bureaucratic infrastructure. Humanistic teaching demands a new definition of the role of the teacher and a new conceptualization of the work of the teacher. Almost all of the literature and research has focused on the impact of humanistic teaching on children. This study will address the impact of this phenomenon on the profession of teaching.

The research on teaching and self-esteem generally supports the humanistic contentions that self-esteem helps learning and that teachers can be very effective in helping children to build self-esteem and thus, enhance both learning and personal growth. As well, schools are faced with a growing population of students who have not developed self-esteem (or for that matter, human-esteem). Consequently, there has been a national trend to incorporate a focus on self-esteem in the schools.

Institutionalizing a focus on self-esteem is problematic and tricky. This study provides an unique understanding of teaching with a focus on self-esteem based on the experiences and meaning made of the experiences of teachers who engage in and create this phenomenon. Such an understanding can help to guide policy for institutionalizing a focus on self-esteem and may offer practical support to individual teachers.

This study is also significant because of the significance of humanistic education to the professional status of teaching. The humanistic approach assumes a new role for teachers; this professional role assumes a higher status than has been traditionally assigned to the profession of teaching. Humanistic teaching means helping a child to develop as a human being, to help him/her to become his/her unique, creative potential. Certainly the traditional role of facilitating the learning of social skills and knowledge is included in humanistic teaching but it is not the defining role of the teacher. Instead, the teacher's own humanity and his/her ability to have a supportive human relationship with each child are the critical factors in teaching. Particularly for the elementary teacher, this role commands more respect

than the traditional role. After all, what adult couldn't deliver a second grade curriculum? I believe that the mark of a good teacher has always been his/her ability to meet the child on a personal level. However, humanistic education demands that this dimension be explicitly understood and valued as a significant part of teaching. Humanistic education regards the profession of teaching with a refreshing reverence. As well, the humanistic approach reveres children and the positive potential of all human beings.

Related to the last issue of significance, is the significance of the method of in-depth phenomenological interviewing that was employed in this study. This method (and a qualitative approach in general) assumes that teachers are the specialists or experts in their field. My assumption is that I can best learn about humanistic education from the teachers who create and are involved in this phenomenon. This study builds knowledge in the field of education from this assumption and about this assumption.

It is my hope that this study validates the view that reality significantly exists within human experience and that we can learn directly from human experience as well as from applied models or ideologies of

human reality. This view holds that reality is not necessarily concrete, determined or static. Instead, this view accepts the possibility of multiple realities and understands reality as fluid.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the phenomenon of teaching with the mission of self-esteem improvement within our nation's schools; to develop a grounded understanding of the composition and dynamics of this phenomenon; and to learn about the actual practices that constitute this phenomenon. I have used the qualitative research method of in-depth phenomenological interviewing as developed by I. Earl Seidman [1985, and 1991], in order to learn from the experiences of elementary school teachers who engage in and create this phenomenon.

A. Qualitative Research

Locke et al [1987] explain the purpose of qualitative research as "to describe and develop a special understanding for a particular social situation, event, role, group, or interaction" [pp. 84]. The qualitative approach is an alternative to the traditional scientific or positivistic approach to research, knowledge and human reality. While many "pure scientists" balk at qualitative methods; there is a growing

effort to develop the qualitative approach and a growing appreciation of the contributions of this approach in the world of research, particularly in the social sciences [Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Patton, 1980].

Qualitative research and positivistic, or quantitative research are based on very different ontological and epistemological assumptions. Lincoln and Guba [1985] offer a fine description of these assumptions:

> Ontological:
>
> (Qualitative)/Naturalist version: There are multiple constructed realities that can be studied only holistically; inquiry into these multiple realities will inevitably diverge (each inquiry raises more questions than it answers) so that prediction and control are unlikely outcomes although some level of understanding (verstehen) can be achieved.
>
> (Quantitative)/Positivist version: There is a single tangible reality "out there" fragmentable into independent variables and processes, any of which can be studied independently of the others;

inquiry can converge onto that reality until, finally, it can be predicted and controlled.

Epistemological:

(Qualitative)/Naturalist version: The inquirer and the "object" of inquiry interact to influence one another; knower and known are inseparable.

(Quantitative)/Positivist version: The inquirer and the object of inquiry are independent; the knower and the known constitute a discrete dualism. [pp. 37]

In many ways the contrast between the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the qualitative approach and the quantitative approach is similar to the contrast between the humanistic branch of psychology or education and traditional psychology or education. In fact, the growing acceptance of the qualitative approach can be understood as a part of the humanistic movement.

Bugental [1972] outlined five characteristics of humanistic psychology which could easily describe qualitative research:

"1) Humanistic psychology cares about people. 2) Humanistic psychology values meaning more than procedure. 3) Humanistic psychology looks for human rather than nonhuman validation. 4) Humanistic psychology accepts the relativism of all knowledge. 5) Humanistic psychology relies heavily upon the phenomenological orientation" [pp. 13].

Maslow [1967] actually wrote about the application and implications of the humanistic model to science. While he presented the basic assumptions that characterize the qualitative approach, he did not go so far as to "espouse" a qualitative methodology for research. Interestingly though, early in his career, Maslow did use what could be called phenomenological interviewing (the method employed in this study) as a method to study human behavior and to learn about the self actualizing personality [Lowry, 1973]. As well, Rogers' client centered method of psychotherapy is similar to phenomenological interviewing. Clearly, the interview and therapy are fundamentally different in purpose, method, content and essence. Still, given the subject of this study, the similarities are interesting. The qualitative approach will offer a humanistic

understanding of the subject of focus, humanistic teaching.

B. In-depth Phenomenological Interviewing and Instrumentation

While the qualitative approach and quantitative approach seem to be clearly delineated and separate in foundation, in practice, research methods can be understood as falling somewhere along a continuum between the two paradigms depending on overall design and purpose, method of data collection, and the method of data analysis. Phenomenological interviewing would be found somewhere near the extreme pole of the qualitative approach. Massarick [1981] describes the method of phenomenological interviewing: "There is little by way of simplistic question/answer exchange; rather free-form modes of communication and iterative opportunities for review and clarification identify the process" [pp. 203].[5]

The particular instrumentation of this method, as I have used it, was developed by I. E. Seidman [1985,

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[5] Actually, by Massarick's typology, the In-depth Phenomenological Interviewing method that I shall employ would fall between "The Depth Interview" and "The Phenomenological Interview."

1991]. Seidman credits the work of David Schuman [1982] and Schuman's colleague, Kenneth Dolbeare, as building the foundation for the method. This method involves a three-interview process. Each interview lasts for 90 minutes. The second and third interview are ideally conducted no less than one day after and no more than one week after the previous interview.

Each interview is framed by a standard introductory question. In this study, the question framing the first interview was "Will you tell me as much as possible about yourself and your background up until the time that you made a conscious effort to focus on self-esteem in your teaching?" The second interview was framed by "Can you tell me about the details of your experiences of teaching with an effort to focus on student self-esteem? What exactly do you do? What is it like?" The third interview was framed by "Now that I know your personal history and experiences related to teaching with an effort to focus on self-esteem, could you tell me what this all means to you?"

After each interview began, additional questions were asked, primarily, to clarify, or probe a statement already made by the interviewee. At times, I also redirected our conversation if it seemed to stray from

the framing question of the interview and the focus on teaching for self-esteem, and if there was a particular area that I wanted to learn more about. The teacher did most of the talking. My goal was to provide a facilitative social relationship within which the participant would tell his/her story.

The purpose of this method of research is meaning making. An underlying assumption is the idea that we can best understand human reality by understanding the meaning made of "reality" by real human beings [Sartre, 1968; Schutz, 1967; Seidman, 1991]. My task as the researcher was to listen as teachers reflected aloud on their present and past experiences with teaching with a focus on self-esteem and as they considered the significance of their experiences in relation to their lives and their profession. In this dissertation, I shall narrate the common and unique themes in their experiences and the meaning made of their experiences in order to increase understanding of the phenomenon of teaching with a focus on self-esteem.

The interviews were held in teacher's classroom after school or if the teacher preferred, another location and time mutually convenient. About half of the interviews were held in a private space in teach-

ers' homes. Interviews were audiotaped on an inconspicuous micro-tape recorder. I began the interviewing process in May, 1991, and conducted the final interview in November, 1992.

Interviews were typed verbatim by a private secretary who does not live or work in any of the districts from which I gathered participants. These transcripts served as my data. The total transcript provides a necessarily extensive and rich context within which the researcher can fairly attempt to narrate another person's story.

C. Participant Population

I identified participants in three different ways. I belong to a local chapter of the National Council on Self-Esteem. Another member of this group is also the director of a regional, state funded teacher center. He agreed to share with me the mailing lists of attendants of three different teachers' conferences focusing on the topic of self-esteem and teaching. Also, at the time of seeking participants, I was professionally involved with many school districts.[6] In my profes-

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[6] I was employed by a grant funded Cornell University Extension program as a Youth Development Community Educator.

sional capacity, I had learned through both formal and informal contacts about individual teachers who are personally interested in self-esteem and teaching. As well, I targeted teachers in buildings and districts that I had learned had adopted an institutional focus on self-esteem (either through hosting in-service courses or by implementing one of the self-esteem curricula).

I sent an introductory letter and a response form with a self-addressed, stamped envelope to targeted teachers (See Appendix C). The introductory letter identified me, the intentions of my research and asked for their participation. I was hoping to interview at least fifteen teachers. Given that my goal was to develop a grounded understanding of this phenomenon based on the teachers' experiences and meaning, I did not enter this project with preconceived criteria to determine participants. I hoped to recruit teachers that have made the decision to teach with a focus on self-esteem as well as teachers who have been encouraged to do so by their institution.

I also hoped to have both teachers that identify their efforts as comprised by implementing a particular curriculum and those that see this effort as a much

more holistic phenomenon. I sought to have teachers representing rural, suburban, and urban schools, as well as different grade levels. I also hoped to have a range of ages, racial and ethnic diversity and both male and female representation in my participants. However, I could not be sure of such a diverse group of participants, given my primary focus and consequential method of recruiting participants. My participants first and foremost must have identified themselves as teaching with a focus on self-esteem.

Forty-four teachers responded to my letter. Out of those forty-four who showed initial interest, I selected thirteen to meet.[7] Selection was based on trying to get a diverse group of participants. I tried to get a range of grade levels and teachers from rural, suburban and urban schools. Only one male teacher responded. I included him in my initial selection.

During an introductory meeting with each of the thirteen, I described my study and the specific structure and purpose of the three interviews. At this initial meeting, I asked the teacher for a commitment to participate. All thirteen agreed to participate. I

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[7] I had already conducted two pilot interviews for this study.

gave him/her a statement of informed consent to read, answered any questions, and asked the participant to sign the statement (Appendix D). I tried to establish a tentative schedule of all three interviews. (The day following that meeting, I sent a written confirmation of the dates to the teacher.) Teachers were offered the right to withdraw at any time during the three interviews and up to thirty days after the last interview. None chose to exercise that right.

The participants in this study did offer a diverse perspective. Participants began teaching with a focus on self-esteem at different times in their career and for different reasons. Some worked in school districts that had a district-wide focus on self-esteem and/or had adopted a self-esteem curriculum. Others made the decision on their own. Three teachers taught in rural schools; six teachers taught in urban schools; and four teachers taught in suburban schools. All but one of my participants were women. Participants ranged in age from approximately their early thirties to late fifties. All of the teachers have been teaching for their entire adult life; they trained to be teachers in college. Some did take time out to raise a family. (For a description of participants, see Appendix E.)

D. Working With The Data

Thirteen of the fifteen interview transcripts served as the exclusive data in this study.[8] I began the process of data analysis by searching for themes in each interview series that seemed significant in light of my research question. I then looked for patterns from all of the interviews that emerged that seemed common or unusual to the experience of teaching for self-esteem.

Before all the data were collected, I couldn't say exactly what final form the analysis would take. My purpose was to develop an in-depth understanding of the constitutive components of the phenomenon of teaching with a focus on self-esteem based on the teachers' stories; thus, I did enter the research with an analysis agenda. However, the process of analysis in qualitative research naturally begins in part with the first field experience and builds gradually as the material is collected [Lofland, 1971; Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Patton, 1980]. I could not help but to

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[8] I chose not to use two interview series. One was with a special education teacher who focused much more on her job of being a special educator and the other was a participant who I think had consumed alcoholic beverages before the second interview and who I know did before the third.

be aware of issues and themes that had come up in past interviews.

Nonetheless, as suggested by Seidman [1991] I did not formally begin the process of data analysis until I finished the process of data collection to prevent my inadvertently shaping the interviews by imposing my researched meaning. This was less difficult than I had supposed because once I was engaged in an interview, my energy was focused on that conversation rather than on analysis. This focus takes effort and is significant to the method of phenomenological interviewing. I did make notes in my interviewing journal after each interview about apparent themes and connections between interviews. I was glad that I did not pursue what I thought were significant themes; after completing all fifteen-interview series, it was clear that much of my preliminary analysis were premature.

When I did formally begin the process of data analysis, I understood my task as developing both "in-digenous" themes, categories that arise from the words of the teachers and "analyst-constructed" themes, "patterns that appear to exist but remain unconceived in the phenomenology of the participants" [Lofland, 1971, pp. 34]. Patton [1980] has described this

process as vacillating between inductive and deductive analysis. "(The researcher) works back and forth between the data and the classification system to verify the meaningfulness and accuracy of the categories and the placement of data in categories" [pp. 311 & 312]. Marshall & Rossman [1989] describe this process of generating themes as "the most difficult, complex, ambiguous, creative and fun" [pp. 115].

This process was definitely both difficult or frustrating and fun or exciting. There were times of fearful questioning about my own role in analyzing others' experiences which seemed inconsistent with phenomenology. There were times of exhausted reverence for the teachers and their commitment to children. There were times of lucid understanding of my task and its importance and how I might go about informing about the phenomenon of teaching with a primary focus on self-esteem.

The process involved winnowing down the interview transcripts to the core story held within. Schatzkammer [1987] uses the metaphor of cutting a diamond to the shape that brings out its best qualities. This process took two-and-a-half months of immersing myself in the task. I read and reread the transcripts and

listened (and sometimes re-listened) to the tapes. I marked passages that stood out for me and labeled these passages with titles that were indigenous to the text. Next, I literally cut and pasted pieces of the text, grouping excerpts with the same titles, forming files for each interview series. I then grouped like files and interviews by larger categories, within interviews and then amongst interviews to come up with themes. When five or more interviews held common themes, I considered that material to reveal issues of significance about the phenomenon of teaching with a focus on self-esteem. I also cut and pasted individual series of interviews to create verbal portraits, or profiles of individuals and their experiences. I shall present the data both in the form of profiles of three individual teachers and in the form of a discussion of significant themes. Both forms will be comprised primarily of participant's own words, unless it is necessary, for reasons of clarity, to add a word or a phrase which will then appear in brackets. I also edited their words so that the language could be presented fluidly in written form. (For example, I eliminated idiosyncrasies of spoken language such as the repeated use of "you know," corrected grammatical errors such as

subject/verb agreement, etc.) In both the presentation of profiles and the presentation of themes, I shall include my words to create the context for and to connect teachers' stories. I shall offer analysis and discussion in the last chapter of this dissertation.

E. Credibility

It is imperative that a researcher establishes the credibility of his/her investigation in order to render valuable results. I incorporated credibility strategies into the design of this study such as prolonged engagement with participants, keeping a personal log, enlisting two peer debriefers (or third readers) and intermittent meetings with my dissertation committee.

The method of in-depth phenomenological interviewing ensures one construct of credibility inherently in its design, prolonged engagement. The three-interview process, and the length of each interview gave me the time to establish a significant relationship with my participants. This increases the likelihood that my reconstruction of my participant's construction of the phenomenon is accurate.

Throughout the process, I kept a personal log. I recorded all efforts that went into my research includ-

ing dates and times of contacts with participants, notes about each of these contacts, and speculative ideas and interpretations that developed during the interview process. This personal log (or journal, as I came to think of it) became very significant to me in a personal way as I conducted the research. I was surprised to find out how much energy the research process demanded. I am speaking, primarily, about an emotional kind of energy. This process facilitated the development of fifteen deep and often intense, but short-term relationships, unlike any interpersonal relationship that I had developed to that point. The focus of these interviews was on the topic of self-esteem, a topic with which I, obviously, have a personal as well as intellectual interest. I often needed to work through my own ideas and feelings after completing an interview session, both about the content of the interview and about the interview process itself. I also recorded emerging ideas about themes and patterns as I began the analysis of this research, often writing pages at a time. These pages turned out to help me see the shape that my material did and did not hold and gave me confidence as I organized my data.

Two peer debriefers were employed (a retired elementary school teacher and a college professor who is familiar with phenomenological interviewing, neither were involved with the study) to work with me during the data analysis phase. Lincoln and Guba [1985] state, "The task of the peer debriefer is to be sure that the investigator is as fully aware of his or her posture and process as possible" [p. 308]. I asked the peer debriefers to periodically review my personal log as I went through the interviews and to review one half of the interview transcripts. I gave them clean copies of the transcripts and asked them to mark passages for comparison to my own analysis. The peer debriefers have also reviewed my final presentation of the data. I found that in almost all of the interviews, we agreed on segments that were significant. This helped me to feel confident and competent in my research. Throughout the process, they dialogued with me, probing, questioning and encouraging re-examination of procedures and emerging interpretations. I found these many hours of conversation stimulating and supportive. We were often in more agreement than I had anticipated; I expected them to be more of devil's advocates than they were.

As well, I met with members of my dissertation committee during the interviewing process, after my initial analysis of data, and throughout the writing process.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF THE DATA IN THE FORM OF THREE PROFILES

Perhaps the most significant element of the experience and meaning made of the experience of teaching with a primary focus on self-esteem is the synergistic relationship between a teacher's own journey with self-esteem and his/her focus on self-esteem in teaching. Each teacher spoke about their own self-esteem as if they seriously reflect on it regularly and they seemed to be aware of the relationship between their own self-esteem and their teaching. About one-third of the participants reported having high self-esteem throughout their lives. The others have developed self-esteem in their adult lives. Most found self-esteem on a personal level and then applied it to teaching. Some noticed the importance of self-esteem for children and then reflected on their own self-esteem.

The three following profiles offer a verbal illustration of the relationship between three personal journeys with self-esteem and teaching with a focus on self-esteem. Each profile illustrates a unique journey with self-esteem.

The first, Jane Wilson, represents a woman who feels that she has always had a sense of high self-esteem. She attributes this to the tremendous sense of community support that she felt as she was growing up in a close-knit family in a rural farm town. Jane feels that children today are missing a sense of community and this interferes with their development of self-esteem. Her focus on self-esteem involves creating a strong sense of community in her fourth-grade classroom. Jane has been teaching with a primary focus on self-esteem for her entire teaching career, about sixteen years. Jane teaches in a suburban town.

A. Jane Wilson (4th Grade Teacher)

One of the things that I think is unique about my life story is my origin. I'm from a rural farm community, a very homogeneous community. Living in that kind of situation is different. For example, I grew up with my grandparents living across the road and I could also see the lights across the valley to my other grandparents. I think that gives people a real sense of security. There were also a lot of relatives around. I really was raised in part of a very extended family. Every night there was somebody back visiting my grand-

parents. They'd come in to pick up their milk or their eggs or whatever but they also sat and talked so you just always had a lot more of a connection. I grew up with that. I went to a one-room schoolhouse with no running water and my aunt was my teacher.

It was a small community and there was lots of support in the community. A farm is a great place for building up your self-esteem because you're always needed. I think if there is one point I notice about kids today, it's hard for us in our society, in a suburban community like (town) , to find genuine places where kids from an early age can be needed. I was always needed. In fact, sometimes I was demanded. I was always needed to collect the eggs and feed the animals. And, you know, it's just like having a pet or a cat at home -- the love, that reciprocal feeling. You give them something like their feed and then, of course, the next day they're very anxious to see you come. It's just constantly there and it's real work on a farm.

I had five or six animals that were mine that I raised and I can still remember, even as late as college, getting a check because the animal had to be slaughtered. That was my animal, and so I got the

check from the slaughter house. There's a lot of emphasis on self-reliance on a farm. You know, you just didn't always run and go get something or do something; you had to do a lot for yourself. And I can remember when I wanted a bow and arrow, my dad made one.

My parents really stressed learning about everything. They're very bright people. I don't know that I always felt that but I know that now.

I was also really involved in the community and the church. The church was always trying to make their budget so there was always dinners and stuff going on. I was always waiting on tables or running a booth at a carnival or doing something. I think that was really critical. I always had meaningful ties.

I also had some really good experiences, maybe not pleasant always, but really good experiences. I remember all of us pitching in and helping take care of people. My grandmother was very, very ill when I was in about eighth grade. So I would take my nights staying with Grandma. It was hard but at the same time, I was needed and it's real -- it's very real. I can remember my grandmother dying in the afternoon. My father came in and he'd been milking cows but he

had to go back out again. There's the sense of life goes on, the cows still need milking, they're counting on you. Yes, we can maybe run a little lighter schedule the next day or so but we keep on going. There's no time or allowance really to sit back and feel sorry for yourself.

High school I really loved. I had a great time. I just tried to do everything I could, from sports to whatever. I drove my parents, particularly my mother, nuts. I was lucky because I was often an officer or a captain. And one of the things that I did when I was in high school is I went abroad. I applied to go with AFS. In my family, no one had ever done anything like that. No one had gone to college and no one had ever gone abroad. I was chosen to go and I ended up spending time in Japan. I look back on it and analyze what it did for me. When I came back, the community was really interested, adults taking interest in a student. I think I did 53 different presentations in my senior year.

One summer, I got a job in a green bean factory. A huge migrant population, people whose values perhaps, or maybe not, were very different. The life style was very different from the sheltered, homo-

geneous neighborhood that I grew up in. That was very interesting because it was another side of people that I hadn't seen before. It all helps you to define who you are. It's part of knowing yourself which then leads into self-esteem.

And then, I went away to college. I went to (College name). I majored in Elementary education and English. (College) was a good school for its time. I had a couple of really good teachers but most were so out of step with what was really needed to be effective. It was bulletin board stuff and I hated it. I think I was insulted. I can remember this one particular class that you had to memorize all the lists of steps to developing a unit. I mean give me a break.

My student teaching experience, the first one, was in Philadelphia, inner city Philadelphia. This was the time Rizzo was police chief. There was all sorts of strife. There was no glass in the windows in my classroom. We had police escorts in and out of the building. It was a situation where they bused Hispanic and other minorities into a Black neighborhood and vice versa in the name of equality. Equality, ha, it was just mixing the minorities. I learned a lot there. I was assigned a third grade that had like 15 or 16 kids.

It was the dumping ground. There were no special ed. laws and there were kids there that they'd never heard speak. There were kids all different ages, autistic, you name it -- they were all dumped in this class. It was an incredible student teaching experience. I was there near Christmas time. We took the kids on the subway and bus. We were taking aspirin. They had just never been into town to a department store. My master teacher was determined we do this so they could see what it was like. I did a whole unit on farming. My mother sent all the real hay and real corn. My parents were very supportive about that.

My husband graduated a year ahead of me and he came here to (town). I followed him, the next year I got a job here, too. Bob's really a positive kind of person. He's always looking for the best. We're good for each other and we're very supportive of each other. The move here was excellent. It certainly wasn't what I'd been trained for in Philadelphia but this is where Bob had a job. Coming into this district, you immediately sense a very high level of professionalism. This place is always full of parents and it should be, it's our school together. It's a real sense of community. There's always this high expectation for what you're

doing for kids. (Superintendent) was one of the most influential people in my teaching because he is the ultimate humanist, the ultimate positive person, the master teacher, the person of utmost faith. It pervades everything he does. Those kinds of mentors that we have are wonderful, you know.

I also had a new principal who was extraordinarily supportive. He always, always, always put the kids first. Not to say that was at the expense of the staff, it wasn't. Because if the kids are first, that's what we're there for, too. It was really a joy to work with him. Good people to work with makes your self-esteem feel better and guess what, if you're feeling good, then obviously it's going to make you feel much better toward the parents and children and other teachers. Morale is very important. People don't always want to talk about that but it's critical, crucial.

My first year and second year was when I really consciously pulled together and said, "What am I doing in a classroom and how is this affecting self-esteem? Okay, what practices can I change?"

I can remember having pencils and all sorts of stuff for kids that said, "I am loving and capable."

And you just have to convince them of that and in many cases convince parents of it. In a community like this, where the expectation is high, that's always a challenge because they'll sit and look at these kids who are nine and ten years old and say, "Oh, you know, what aren't they doing?" Lots of times I have to say, "What were you doing when you were nine years old?"

Some of the kids aren't happy. They have everything and they are not happy. I think you have to look at why. And it's basically directly related to self-esteem. Some of it's in their control and some of it isn't. Parents have a lot to do with it but so does the whole community. That's what I was talking about, about my bringing up. Everybody knew you or knew your parents and there was just this tremendous sense of community. We sometimes lose sight of that need. I think what I do in my classroom is to create a sense of community.

Self-esteem is one of those things where you just work at it little by little, by little. It's not one of those things where you can say, "Okay, this week I'm going to do self-esteem and that takes care of it." I think sometimes people get into units on self-esteem. I suppose that's fine but not within itself. I feel

you just have to have it as a focus every day. Some days there may be direct instructions and other days it may just be peripheral.

At the beginning of the year, I ask the kids to write a resume to apply for the job of fourth grader. I want some information from them that I don't find in their permanent records. I want to know from the kids what they have as strengths or what they perceive as their strengths. I'm also looking at a couple skills. I want to know if they can write their name and address. But beyond that, I ask what are your hobbies? I get at skills that I don't see. I also ask them to write a couple of sentences about why they will be a great fourth grader. I want to see that right away. What can you contribute? Some kids will need a lot of nudging because for some reason that they don't see why they'll be a great fourth grader. It's a hard way to start the year if you don't feel coming in that it's going to be great. I write "hired" over the top of it and then I pin them up. That's the kind of little things that we do.

Also, I have the kids do a time capsule from the first day of school to the last day of school. I have them write down things like, one of the things that I

love in my friend; my favorite supper; I only wish; if my parents only knew; those kinds of things. I never look at these. We put them in a shoe box and seal the box and put them in the cupboard and get it out the last morning. They're real excited about that. And then we process all the changes they've gone through. You have to process for these activities to be meaningful. Before we open the time capsule, I ask, "Can you remember what you wrote?" And then, after, "How do you think you've changed? What do you suppose those things might say about you? This problem that was bothering you, you can't even remember it now. Some of the problems don't go away. But have we made any progress? Are we better off or if we're not, what do you need to be doing?"

I really get annoyed when people don't take kids seriously. That really bugs me. As if they can't have real problems until they're real people, in other words, 18, voting and out of high school. Their problems are so real to them. You have to get into the head of the kid's reality. You have to legitimize and authenticate kid's issues and let them use their age-appropriate power, which is basically what most of the kids need. It is hard to find situations for kids

where they are legitimately needed and are given the training ahead of time to be successful.

We developed a program of peer tutoring but we don't just say to the kids, "Okay, we're going down to the kindergarten." It won't work. We have a training manual. We talk a little bit about how do you approach little kids and work with them so they'll have the skills. Then we come back afterwards and process. You don't just go down and color a picture and come back. You've got to plan and you've got to process. Then the kids have success. That's crucial for self-esteem.

At Christmas time, or I should say at December holiday time, we don't have grab bag gifts. The kids instead bring in two or three dollar items for the county nursing home. We wrap those and have those delivered at holiday time. Those are ways that kids can see that, what they do, can make a difference.

I have high expectations. I try to be very consistent. I try to be very fair and most of all, I try to really have a good time. We're notorious for bad jokes and puns and that kind of stuff. There's also that point at which I won't tolerate anything. It's a matter of emotional safety for the kids in this class and I will not tolerate somebody who cannot be a

good citizen. I will work with anybody so we can get that kid on track because they're hurting themselves and also hurting all the other kids. When people come back to me at the end of the year and say, "Wow, what a change in this kid," I feel good.

I don't perform miracles. I had one child that said to me, "This year I'm going to get out of resource reading." Now this is a child who is struggling incredibly academically, and his mom who we have counseled on and on and on, says, "Yeah, if you would just work, you would get out of resource room." I'm like, you know, that's not true. I mean it would be like saying to me, "If you just worked hard, you could make the U.S. Gymnastics Team." That's nuts. It's never going to happen. I'm not saying that he'll never get out of resource room but I said, "Oh, gee, Scott, it's just good to have that kind of extra support, you know, and somebody that you can talk with. Don't look to give that up yet. Take it, enjoy it, use it." And I tried to be very up. Different kids have different strengths and weaknesses. Part of my job is to help children learn about their particular make-up and feel proud of who they are.

I think too often, in the name of self-esteem, people are phony with kids. People praise falsely but kids know it, you know. They know whether you're just handing them gratuitous comments that really are meaningless. You can't take a whole group of kids and keep saying to them, "Oh, you're all wonderful. You're perfect. You're all students of the month. You're all this." That's stupid, you know. It's very discouraging for the kids that were doing well and it's fake for the kids that need to be working harder.

We have two half-hour conferences every year with every parent. I was dismayed with what was happening with me talking to the parents and the parents interpreting what I said to the kids. I said nuts to this. Now, I give each kid a self-evaluation at each report card time. I've got questions like, my desk is neat and orderly, I am considerate of other people's feelings, that kind of thing and they mark, always, sometimes, usually, never. I like to see how the kids mark that. If I agree with them within one, I figure it's great. If we're really far apart, then that's where I say, "I really need a conference with this child before I talk with the parents." At the bottom I have two questions. I have "I am proud of___," and it

can be anything school related. I also ask them to state a goal, "I want to ___." At the end of the year I make copies of these and then I can hand them to the next teacher. The last evaluation, the kids have written their goal for fifth grade. After they have filled that out, then I give them their report card. I won't give them their report card first because some of the kids will just say, "Oh, well, she doesn't think I'm neat and tidy, so, okay." I don't want that. I want their response. And I always ask them, "Is there anything you want me to share with your parents or anything you want me to highlight at the conference, anything you want me to forget about?" So, you know, again, legitimizing them as learners, as in charge of their own learning.

I hate giving marks because they don't say anything to them. You know, you really need to write comments. You have to tell them what they're doing that's right and what's the thing they need to focus on. We do use grades, too. We have a system which is not perfect but it's better than most. Zero meaning unsatisfactory. I think I have given one zero in twenty some years. You have to really not want to be here in order to do that. One means needs to improve.

Two means satisfactory. Three and four mean that you're doing more than is expected for the instructional group. Now that's very key because if a child is in a low skill group, that does not mean that he can never get an A, a four, the top. That's very positive.

I usually keep sheets of criteria. Like if they're going to have to do a project, here are the ten things I'm going to look for. I put them on a chart. I give them the grading sheets right from the State. This is what it means if you get a four: you've done this with the topic, you've done this with sentence structure, and you've done this with vocabulary. Lots of times I'll say, "Okay, you put down what you think you would give this essay." And then I'll put down what I think it is and, again, if we're real far apart, we've got to talk but if we're pretty close together, it's okay. That takes more time. I guess I'd rather do a few assignments well like that, than send home five ditto sheets every day that I've stamped. It takes a lot of energy. But it's worth it. It's absolutely fundamental.

There's just no heart in education unless you focus on self-esteem. You may be able to get to their

brain but their heart isn't in it and that is what you really need if you're going to talk about the community life and lifelong learning. We have to say to kids, "Why do you think you're here? What part are you going to play in humankind?" We need to teach them, "You have a role. You fit some place in this cosmos, in this universe. What's it going to be? What are you going to do? How is life going to be different because you were here? You've got a lot of choices to make about that and you've got lots of talents to offer. That's why you're going to school." And we need to make it true.

Self-esteem is the essence of the whole child. It's the essence of educating the whole person. It has to be in the curriculum but it can't be by itself, either. Kids also need to really learn content, you know. Teaching is always balancing -- balancing time, balancing schedules, and balancing kids' needs.

This notion of teaching is really different from what the common school was. Before you had the extended family. You had a social group, or fraternal group, a church or something that helped. Many, many families are without that these days. So here we are, you know here we are. And, I think, here we are to stay. This

is society's place for bringing kids together. We're increasingly offering services, social work, meal programs, immunizations, and whatever at the schools. I think schools increasingly are going to be serving as a base for community. I don't know that all teachers are comfortable with that.

This brings up the issue of teacher training. Those methods courses are worthless, Mickey Mouse. Teachers should have a strong liberal arts background and then go to graduate school for professional training, like the medical model. The courses need to focus on children, on human development, on relationships, and on learning styles. And then, there should be a residency. Eight weeks or sixteen weeks, just doesn't cut it.

. . . There is also the issue of facilities. We're already crowded here. They're bringing day care in here this year. What does that mean for the music program which is on the stage in the cafeteria? Is she going to lose her space now because we've got day care? You know, we've got to work these things out. I think governance is going to be an issue. How are school boards going to function? Are they going to work cooperatively with the state health department, county

health department, or whatever, providing services to kids? Where is the money going to come from? We give our own time to meet children's personal needs. If you're going to keep asking staff to do that, how are you going to help because that can wear very thin. Several teachers are here by six in the morning. A lot of us have keys. We're here all the time. Sundays in the winter are busy here. We have to let the community know, "This is what your schools are doing."

I remember growing up and going to museums and doing all sorts of day trips on the weekends. Kids don't get to do that anymore in today's world. If we're going to incorporate this as part of our program, then the funding has to be there. We spend one half of one percent of our budgets on staff development. In corporations it's fifteen to twenty percent. I mean what can you say to that, if you want to make these transitions, if you want to have these services . . .?

I think too often schools are still run by a very fraternal type group who thinks they know our needs, what the kids are like and, yet, they taught very little and if they did, that was twenty years ago.

One of our big complaints is that we are not given release time for grade level meetings. We have so much

that we can share, across the grade level, across the four or five buildings in the district. It's very, very powerful when we get together. We save people a lot of money. We just have great ideas. And we asked for a half a day, a year, and we were denied that. And in response to the half a day, a year, we would guarantee we would come three afternoons for other grade level meetings after school. It's like a double standard because you certainly don't see administrative meetings starting at 3:30 in the afternoon. I mean their staff meetings start 9:00 Wednesday morning and then they have lunch. All that stuff can affect self-esteem. Instead, I hosted these couple meetings at my home after school and they were still well attended but you don't have the same energy.

Even with all that frustration, and this is comparatively a <u>supportive</u> district, there's always that feeling that you've got your room; in this area you can really make a difference and that's the joy of teaching. In your own classroom, you set the tone.

The second profile, Colleen Duffy, presents a woman who has struggled in her adult life to develop self-esteem. Colleen feels that her unique personhood was not valued by the adults in her life as she was

growing up. Instead, she was taught that only certain ways of being were acceptable. Colleen always sensed that something was missing but it was not until she suffered much turmoil in her adult life that she discovered her own self and developed self-esteem. She hopes that she can prevent such unhappiness for the students in her first-grade classroom by helping them to realize the value of their unique potentials. Colleen has been teaching with a primary focus on self-esteem for the past two years. She describes what a different way of teaching this is for her in comparison to her first sixteen years of teaching. Colleen teaches in a rural school.

B. Colleen Duffy (1st Grade Teacher)

I grew up in a very strict Irish-Catholic family. I went to Catholic school. My family was a tremendous shame-based family -- goodness was not a part of your natural being. You had to almost dig it out from some place else or put it on like an item of clothing. You were not good in and of yourself. You had to prove yourself somehow worthy to be good or loved or lovable. And I had a large family. I was third oldest of seven. I had a mother that stayed home, a father that worked

for the state. I had a real problem with "being." I struggled with that for all of my young life and into puberty. Then I did a heroic thing -- decided in fifth grade that as long as I was a good Irish-Catholic that I would become a nun. At age ten I decided to shut down the world. I was also growing physically and was a very heavy child, immediately rejected because of the heaviness. Never felt that there was anything lovable about me, nor anyone could if they wanted to love me, a sense that innate goodness wasn't there. So at age ten I decided to be a nun and carried that with me which was my protection. Kept everyone out until I graduated from high school. I did do a lot of active social things in high school. Got involved in plays; I was very theatrical. I did a lot of singing and got recognition in that way but always very superficial recognition. I never had real relationships; always was the counselor, the consoler, you know, the bridesmaid but never the bride. At age nineteen, I went into the convent, spent nine years there. I spent my twenties in the convent. It was a tremendous place to get recognized for being someone but not for being myself. That's when I realized that there was more of me than just who I was, what my title was and what

other people recognized. I decided that I needed to have personal recognition and I didn't know what that was. It was very terrifying but I knew I needed to leave the security of the convent in order to find out what journey this life was taking me on, and at age 29 I decided it was time to spread my wings and leave.

I didn't have to take a lot of risks in the convent. I was taken care of physically, housed, and educated and I had employment. I didn't have any of the pressures of society. It was, by this time, the late seventies but there was a very strong voice inside, a voice that has always been inside of me, and always been recognized, usually a very small voice but a voice that said that, "This is not what it's all about." And, "Life is not meant to be hidden." And I wasn't sure what that meant but I thought, well, it's time to do what I need to do. In the late seventies a lot of young nuns were leaving. Unfortunately, what I was told was the best were leaving which made me feel good in a way but again, it was a role that I played and a costume that I put on and I never felt very authentic so I needed some time to find out who I was. I was 29 years old and I had absolutely no idea who I was. Everything kind of opened up. I went through the

counseling scene and it was a counselor who said to me at our last session as I walked down the stairs, she looked back at me and she said, "I hope someday you realize what a beautiful person you are." And it's the first time that I heard those words and I discounted them immediately and I thought, "Yeah, if she only knew." So at that point I had only the self-esteem that I projected as my role, as an image, as a performance. It was not integrated.

I really did project high self-esteem -- "You're so good at what you do." You know, and I was good at what I did. I easily integrated into situations, but that was part of my skill and my defense. As long as I projected, I didn't have to really feel it. It was all part of the game.

I had taught in the Catholic School while I was at the convent and I had a reputation as a good primary teacher, so I took a job in <u>(city).</u>

As a teacher, I did exactly what was done to me. I taught with extreme discipline, not a great deal of tenderness. I was not one of these touchy-feely teachers, didn't get into the hug bit. I was on my pedestal and, you know, they needed law and order and justice and I was able to do that quite well. I

modelled how I was taught, even though I felt it was extremely detrimental. At one point when I got into education, I realized that I wanted to do it differently but I didn't know how. I didn't want someone leaving my classroom and twenty-five years later, remembering how horrendous they felt and how discounted as a person they felt but I didn't know how to do it differently, so I did it the way that I had been taught.

Nurturing was not my thing. I didn't do it well. I didn't know how to do it. No one had ever shown me, so I taught with a great deal of feeling but it was not acceptable to show my feelings. After three years I had met and was engaged to the love of my life; thirty-one years old, still a virgin, and decided that this was it, that it was time. I continued to teach the way I taught, I got involved in politics in the district, built a home, and lived the happily-ever-after life. I thought now I have arrived; this is it.

At the end of the eighties -- I would say 88 or 89 -- my nine-year relationship came to a very abrupt end. Very abrupt. The man that I was going to grow old with just made a statement that he wanted to make it on his own. My purpose of living was ended. I

didn't see it coming. Looking back now, there were episodes of question but I was such a control freak that I figured I could fix everything and anything and that it was just a passing stage. So in the spring of 1989, my husband decided to leave the house and get engaged to another woman. Then all of the games, all of my props, all of my disguises, all of my masks, all of the person that I thought I was, left. I was reduced to nothing.

As I picked up the pieces, that's where I decided that I was going to work on my self-esteem. I realized that the child within was the one that needed work. Some original thing had stopped growing. So that is when I got in touch with what it was all about to be a child, to be unrecognized, unloved and unlovable.

That little voice was still there and the original pain was still there, so the trigger was the abandonment in my marriage but the original abandonment had always been felt and the original rejection of never being good enough, never being valued, never being right enough, never being okay just for you, was felt. So all of those 39 years worth of pushed down feelings just kind of exploded. I did some Twelve-Step work because there was alcoholism involved. I did some

inner-child work centering on ACOA issues. I did Over Eaters Anonymous because of my food addiction. Then I got into group therapy and in my group therapy there was tremendous emphasis on the child within and it was the first time that I was in a room with people that recognized that it's the damaged child that needs to be healed so that all the other healing would take place. It gets harder I think as I get closer to self. It gets more frightening, more terrifying that the original pain has not been felt and that until that is healed, until I peel the onion a little bit further, that anything that I build on that, whether it be a relationship or whether it be a career, anything I build on that is not going to be as healthy as it could be. So as I worked in my adult groups with the message that I'm sending my child, the acclamations that she never heard in her, in <u>my</u> early years, and I thought, why aren't kids humanized, why aren't they given acclamations, why do they have to be forty years old and struggle to find out that they are lovable enough? What is it that I can give them without their having to pay a price? They don't have to earn love -- they need to be loved because they are. They are in existence

and, therefore, they contain a valuable uniqueness that makes them, them. So that's when I started.

It is extremely spiritual. It's an attitude and the presence you are. It's what you carry in and out of the room or throughout a school year. It's the reality that you have your ups and downs. It's the okayness that says that I can read beautiful stories to my class and cry and I can share feelings with children and model that adults have feelings that are not always seen as safe by children. As I learn to recognize the uniqueness of kids today, they are recognizing my uniqueness. Their acceptance of me as a person, in as real as I am today, is a gift that in the 18 years that I've been teaching, the last two have probably been for me the greatest gift that any class has ever given me, that they have a warmth and a love and a tenderness for me that I would never have felt, nor realized the need of, for the 16 years before.

When I first started teaching in public school, negative people were people that I stayed away from. Negativism was so contagious and I decided, whether it was a fairy tale or not, that negativism was deadly and that was not the message that I was going to carry. I kind of went overboard to the point that everything

was positive. Well, it wasn't positive. It was my dream world of making it positive and that was faking it. And today, it's not that. Today, it's if the reality is the situation isn't good, what can I do with it? And there is a big difference between recognizing what's fair, what's just, what's abusive, what I will not tolerate today that I would have tolerated with a smile and just been thankful that somebody didn't reject me, years ago. You know, tippytoeing around parents so that they didn't think badly of me, instead of being as honest as I could have been. And now I don't need to have control over what other people think today and I'm learning. A lot of it is in the early stages and so much of it is just beginning. But I know that I can bring a difference in today's kids.

When I first started teaching, I was untouchable. I was taught that you don't smile until after Thanksgiving. You work on your school look. You get a good teacher look and control was acknowledged by supervisors. My superiors would look for quiet classrooms where children were attentive. Discipline problems were not acceptable. Children were not encouraged to be unique. They looked the same. They wore uniforms. They lined up. They didn't talk. They were robotic

and that was rewarded. You got positive evaluations if that's what they saw and I carried that, after I left Catholic school, I carried that with me to public school. It's the only way I knew how to do it . . . line them up.

There was always a voice inside of me that says, "Don't damage children. Children aren't to be damaged." But I didn't know better. It was ignorance. I gave them the best I could with what I had. I just didn't have all of the skills that I needed to touch them in a gentler way. It's like kids would come up and want a hug and I'd kind of push them away. It's like, "Don't do this to me," you know, I needed to separate the professional me from the human me, when in fact most of me was the professional me. I didn't have too much of a humanity.

Now, I think we are rendering abuse to children that are not personally connected in a classroom to the chief caregiver, the teacher, especially young classrooms. As I went through my own metamorphoses, I began to feel that it was part of my job to give children a safe place to share their feelings.

We were also at this time integrating the abuse prevention program, the Good Touch, Bad Touch -- say

no, get away and tell someone and I'm thinking, well, how would you know who to tell if you haven't had any rapport with someone that you would know would listen and, when is it safe? I also had an incident this year of a child being sexually molested by a sibling and that was a big trauma. I was aware of it but it was almost like an afterthought that I should be made aware of this because it was a big secret. I also know that there are, especially in dealing with alcoholism, that family secrets are really powerful and if you feel like it's your fault, then who do you tell without feeling the shame and the guilt of it? Children learn very early that they don't talk. There's a no talk rule. You don't air your dirty laundry, as it would be said in my family of origin. So I thought, they spend a tremendous amount of time with me. How can I make it safe for them? I am not a therapist. I never pretended to be a therapist but I have a tremendous need to stop the cycle of fear and abuse and the no talk rule, so that children can validate their own feelings. I don't ever remember a feeling other than glad being validated for me and I thought these children have a right to know that they have feelings. So in our quiet time after recess, we started doing something called,

"the safety circle," where we sat on the rug, all of us, and we just played an "I game." I introduced five major feelings that all the other feelings seem to fall into: mad, glad, sad, lonely, scared. And I said, "What are you feeling?" They would say, "I'm feeling good." And I would say, "Give it a feeling name. Good can mean what?" And then, "Like glad." And then they would start connecting two feelings, "Well, I'm feeling happy which is glad but there's part of me that's sad because, you know, I'm not going to see my grandpa for a long time because they're going to Florida cause he needs to go and I feel glad that he's taking care of his health but I'm going to miss him and that makes me feel sad." Sometimes I would just go around and I'd say, "Feeling check," and it was always valid to say, "pass." What was amazing is they never just copycatted somebody next to them. They would get in touch with their feelings. A child might say, "When I have a bad dream, I feel . . ." And then that would be a spring-board for me to do a lesson about bad dreams. Maybe the next day we would do some role playing. We're talking about maybe twenty minutes, nothing big, but at a very crucial time where they're unwinding from outside play to come inside, getting in touch.

I started watching children modelling my affirmation. I'd say, "I'm really glad you tried to do that. I can see a difference between yesterday and today. What a tremendous job you've done." And I could hear kids giving those kinds of remarks to other people and to me. I would say to them, "Okay, I need to draw a picture on the board and I am not a good drawer." I would do my best at my little figures and somebody in my group would say, "Miss Duffy, that was a great job. I'm glad you tried that." Whoa! You know, talk about affirming. They were starting to model some of the behaviors that they had seen. They were also starting to take risks in my group. So the safety circle became a springboard for personal relationships. Someone would say, "I'm feeling sad because when I go home from school today, my dad's not going to be there. He and my mom are separating." And I would say, "I can see you're sad. I can see the sad on your face and I want you to know it's Okay to feel sad." And instead of, you know, "Well, it's going to get better," because that's not validating the feeling. "What can we do if we're sad?" is more like it. So that would be a springboard. So after safety circle I could go up and say to someone, "You know, I know that

what you're going through right now is real sad and it may be even scary." So I could tie another feeling in and, "If you would like some private time, just let me know." So that I was not intrusive, but what I was doing was working on feeling that because they felt, they were.

Self-esteem, to me, is validating self to the point that I can recognize and label what I am and what I'm doing and what I'm feeling and that no one else has the power to make me feel differently, unless I choose to give it away. So that when a child says, "I'm feeling angry," my old self would say, "It's not okay." Just in my tone of voice, they knew it made me angry that they were angry. So now I would say, "Feeling angry is okay. It is not okay for you to hurt someone when you're feeling angry. What else can you do when you're angry?" And then they would come up with options. So the whole focus for me, was taking myself out of that power role and putting myself into an option role and one of the options was to come and talk to me.

My principal was a bit concerned about the safety circle. She felt that maybe I was crossing over into psychology or into counseling that I was not

equipped for. I listened to her voice this and I also had to step out of it so that I didn't get my defenses up because I realized that it maybe triggering other things for her that were not a part of me.

She said, "Well, what happens if someone divulges something in that group and you have to confront a parent with that?" And I said, "Well, it's called a safety circle because the rule is what's said in the group, stays in the group and then I also put a disclaimer on there and it says, "If I hear something that is hurtful to you, as an adult, as a grown-up, I have a responsibility to stop it from hurting you. If someone is hurting you and you share that with the group, then I have a responsibility to make that stop." And I'm very honest with them, "Sometimes I don't have that much power. Sometimes I may tell it to the people that need to hear it and it still doesn't stop." And I've had children say, "I can't talk to you about this. My mother or father told me that I'm not to tell you anything about this." And I would say, "Then you need to do what you need to do but if it hurts inside and you want to share that hurt, I will listen."

I did not win the principal over through any kind of propaganda. I shared the experiences with my

colleagues. I talked to parents about it. I talked with (principal) about it and anyone else that was in any kind of position to want to know what I was doing. I invited them in to participate, not to observe. If they come in, they must participate -- experience it. Of course, they can pass.

It was important to share it. As I hooked key people in, it became a more acceptable thing. Now, I also know that there's gray areas here that I'm going to have to be aware of. But my principal now is extremely in favor, very promoting of it.

I think I intimidate some people and it's funny cause I don't do it deliberately but I'm very outspoken in my beliefs in advocating for children. If I see or sense that children are not being recognized, then I may say something and, again, I do it with the expertise that I have of not shaming someone else. To advocate for a child is my first role. I'm not there for the other adults. I don't have to make a difference in their lives. If they're threatened by me, I don't go out of my way to antagonize that but at the same time I usually don't back down easily. I don't get confrontational. Confrontation is not something that I enjoy. I can do it if I'm defending a child.

I don't like it when someone is alienated from me. I don't like it because I believe in a team approach, and this really diminishes the team. So I really work hard at building a rapport with the professionals that I work with, but not at the cost of children.

The more I believe in what I'm doing myself, the less I have to project any image, other than I'm using what I believe is right for me and that it may not work for somebody else and that's okay. I've backed away from my judgments.

There's still a whole chunk of me that doesn't, yet, believe in myself. But as I work with children, I have a chance to generate my own self-esteem.

In our class we have standing ovations. If someone is having an unusually hard day or something sad has happened in their life, we want to recognize the person as being special and that we realize what they've been through. We get up and cheer and scream and yell and clap and cause all sorts of embarrassment -- well, usually if it's an adult, all sorts of embarrassment. For a child, they just kind of soak it all in but we also rub it in, literally. It's not just heard but it's felt.

But the specific activities are only a small part of what it's all about. It's the atmosphere and the attitude that we project of being real. I don't want clones. I don't want, you know, phony feelings coming out.

The content of first grade curriculum isn't an outside issue. When I incorporate self-esteem, it's as simple as in a math lesson when someone comes up with a different way of doing it, to dignify their response -- unheard of back in my early days -- to dignify a response and then to point out where that response would be valid if the question were this. If I'm dealing with, you know, a closed-ended question that only has one answer, then I need to make sure that I'm, first of all, providing accurate information. I don't want a child to go away thinking that if you take 2 and 2 and 2, you're going to come up with something other than 6. So if they put a 9, my job is to say, "You know there may be two things going on. What do you think the answer is?" And they might <u>say</u>, "It's 6." And I say, "Then that tells me that you're mixing up how to make a 6 and how to make a 9. Turn the slate (cause I use slates) over and what answer do you see?" And then I say, "Now I know that's where I need

to work and that's where you need to work." And then the child, first of all, is validated. She is not made fun of. No one has the right to make fun of the wrong answer and I mean no one. They don't need to. I mean if they think it, I don't have any control over thoughts but I do have control over what they say out of their mouths. The know that making fun of a wrong answer pulls a lot of my strings and so they usually don't.

In my own first grade experience if I raised my hand and I had the wrong answer, I would never raise my hand again because it was shameful. But I feel if a child has given me the wrong answer, it means that I have to do a better job in teaching, so they get the answer right. That's how I see it. That's not how it was taught to me. And in my classroom it's okay to not get it. It's okay to need more practice.

I have less need to control, these days, than I ever had. I see children, today, as the child, my child within. As I touch her to the level that I'm touching her, I realize how vulnerable, how scary it is to be a child without validation, how unsafe I felt as a child and that if I am promising my child within, a safe nurturing place, then I also have a responsibility

to provide that for the children in my class. So as I make a stronger commitment to myself, I live out my commitment to them too.

What teaching with a focus on self-esteem means to me is that I have a chance to relive in a way or undo and rebuild some damage that I've internalized in my young growth and development. It also gives me a sense of hope. Today, I grieve a childhood that I never had. That's a tremendous loss for me. It does not have to be a loss for the children that I teach.

I don't see my job today as really a job. I have a sense of adventure that comes when you touch young lives. I don't think I ever had a sense of that for the first sixteen years of teaching. When I get up in the morning, I have good feelings, most of the time, unless I need a mental health day and then I take one. I enjoy the people I work with. I don't let other people dictate how I am going to see myself. I don't have to be a people pleaser today. Children accept me as adult, as a person. The acceptance of a child is a real gift. I'm giving but I'm getting so much more. I can't believe the gifts that I've received and what I've learned -- how to be more spontaneous and how to let go of control.

Teaching with a focus on self-esteem evolves. For me it means wonderment. It means excitement. It means risks. It means changing.

It takes the power away from the teacher as the focal point and puts it into an atmosphere of we are all in this together and we will make it together and each one of us has to do our part in order to do that. No one has any more control than the other. You have to have an essential overseer, the teacher, but ownership in the process has to be everyone's responsibility.

I am probably more emotionally exhausted at the end of the day because I'm focusing on each individual, as well as a collection of individuals, as well as where they fit in the school system and who they impact in the system and how they might impact the system. So it's exhausting but it's very rewarding work.

This third profile, Karen Van Rennick, presents a woman who has realized her need to develop self-esteem from realizing her students' need. She grew up in a dysfunctional family and feels she never believed in herself. She saw this attitude in her students and decided that her priority in teaching would be to help them to believe in themselves. This approach brought

success! Karen considers this approach to be central to her teaching and perhaps even her life. She seems to feel that her students' self-esteem and well-being brings significance to her life. Karen teaches pre-kindergarten in an inner-city school.

C. Karen Van Rennick (Pre-k Teacher)

If teaching embraces this focus on self-concept, I think we're going to have a better adjusted population, happier people who have more confidence in what they can do. And that includes teachers! I know it's made a world of difference in my life since I've started.

I grew up in a dysfunctional family. I was never made to feel like anything I did was good enough or right. My parents were alcoholics. I was the second child. I had an older sister who was perfect. She was bright. She just did everything the right way and I came along and everything was harder for me and my parents didn't like that. My mother was a teacher. My sister did such a good job in school and I came along and I couldn't. It was hard following somebody, a sister who never had any problem. My teachers wouldn't say that I was stupid but they would say things like, "It's hard to believe that you are Ellen's little

sister," or, "Is your mother aware that you and your sister are so different?" Other ways of saying, you know, "Where did you come from?" I'm left-handed so I'm artistic and creative. Math was terrible. Nobody would ever say, "Catherine, you're having trouble with this, let me help you." They'd always call my mom and then I would get home and I would just be whammied out of the blue with my trouble with Math. In the second grade, I can remember my mother having to come in to school; those stupid little cuisineaire rods! The teacher explained to my mother that I couldn't count by tens or something. I thought, what does it matter? This is stupid. What about all the creative writing and stuff I do? I was always made to feel bad. In high school I just started forging my own failure notes and changing the grades on my report cards that I would take home. I would just deal with knowing I was in trouble but always being afraid I was going to get caught, always. I had to go to summer school every year for Math.

I got in remedial reading in 7th grade. Now, I'm somebody who reads a book like every two days and my reading level had always been very high. To be put in remedial reading just made me feel even more like I was

being punished and it was because I didn't want to bother to do the stupid comprehension questions. I just was like being punished constantly. I felt like that at school and then I would go home and it would be, "Go to your room, do your homework," and unexplained punishment regarding school work. Nobody ever focused on what I could do well. I was a swimmer. I was breaking records at the age of 7 and getting all kinds of publicity and attention from my swimming. My mom would never acknowledge it. She would never say anything like, "We're really proud of you." She threw away all my clippings and all my medals.

When I graduated from high school, I really held my breath on graduation day to see if I was going to graduate. I wanted to join the service because I figured that's where dumb people like me went. My mother said, "No, you're going to go to college." I thought, "How can I go to college? Look at my grades." I got into (college) because of my extracurricular activities. They were willing to take a chance on me. Just being away from home and being the one responsible for myself, I started to make Dean's List right away. I was studying things I was interested in. I knew I wanted to major in early childhood education. I

started to get a kick out of achieving. Whereas, before I guess I'd always thought that if I did well, it was for my mother, not for me. And when it was for me, it was a lot more fun. So, once I got away from home, school was a lot more fun. Recently, I got my Master's Degree. I was probably more surprised than anybody else or more personally tickled because it was something I never thought that I would achieve, ever.

I always wanted to be a kindergarten teacher or a nursery school teacher, always! I just loved little kids. I thought the two-year degree would be enough but (college) had this wonderful thing called "GUTS," Guidance and Uplifting Training of Students, that was required for all freshmen. They had us in groups with professors that we would be working with. One of the exercises, you had to close your eyes and stand in the middle of the circle and lean back. You had to trust other people would catch you. And growing up the way I did, I didn't trust anybody. It was like a support group. It was one of my first experiences of trusting somebody else and having somebody trust me and trust my judgement and my decisions and it was a real hard thing to get used to. It was new with the GUTS program, and

doing as well as I did, I decided to stay for the four-year program.

As soon as I graduated, I went off to Australia. I taught 3rd and 4th grade. I loved it but I didn't like the principal at all. He was a real militant. It was their style but I just hadn't been there long enough to realize that. He made me real nervous and I always wondered if he thought I was doing a good job. I applied for a transfer when the school year ended. I was transferred to a five-teacher school out in the bush. I had a first and second grade and that was great. I still wasn't all that confident but I just loved it. I did that for a year and then I got transferred back to the city. I was in a ghetto suburb. I had 5th grade one year and was having a wonderful time. Then that bozo that I started with got promoted to my new school and I thought, "Well, it's time for me to leave." Plus, I had that stupid New York State requirement of getting my Master's.

When I got back to the States, I got a job teaching high school in downtown <u>(city)</u>. I had the special ed. kids, the behavior disturbed, the disabled kids and they had an awful lot of trouble doing the academics because they didn't believe in themselves. All their

lives they'd been told they were bad and couldn't do things. I'd say to them, "You can do this!" They'd say, "No, I can't. I'm bad." And it was then that I realized that my own childhood was influencing my behavior as an adult.

I was coaching the varsity swimming and diving team. I offered to let some of the Special Ed. kids try out for the team. They said they had never been allowed to before because of their behavior. Whenever these kids had tried out, they'd been cut immediately, no matter what kind of potential or ability they had because they were pegged as bad, "problems." I took them no matter what and worked with them. I had National Honor Society kids on the team, the cream of the school, and these kids just sort of took on my attitude of "let's help these guys." I had one boy who weighed about 350 pounds, just huge. He called himself the whale. He decided that he liked the breast stroke and it would take him about five minutes to swim four lengths of the pool but he would do it without stopping. Sometimes his one or two points that he got for finishing his race would be enough to put us over the edge and we would win. I saw such a difference in these few kids that came out for the team. They had a

little success in their life and it started to carry over into other things. One of the boys started going to Gold's gym and working out. We all saw his body change within a year. And along with the body changes came this attitude of "Hey, I can do this!" And it really impacted me. All of a sudden, it just hit me that they have to have some success. They have to feel good about themselves in order to be willing to try more. Right then, I just started to put the social studies and some of the academics as second importance and just started trying to pump them up emotionally. And ever since, it's been my key thing that if you feel good about yourself, and you have a good self-concept, you're going to make it. I refuse to let anybody tell me that that's not true because I've seen it. And finally, I felt really sure of myself and what I was doing. But still, I always wanted to teach the little ones.

So I went one Sunday and I got <u>The New York Times</u> and after I read world news, I flipped to the classifieds. I hadn't been doing that and here was this, I even have it in my wallet, this big, black-framed ad. It was a position opening for pre-k. I got called in for an interview. There was this woman ahead of me and

she looked like the traditional nursery school teacher, an old baby, all soft and a big, old dress and I thought, "She'll get the job." But I went in and I brought a scrapbook of classrooms that I'd taught in, special projects, photographs, and newspaper clippings. I showed them that. Nine o'clock that night, he called and offered me the job. It was meant to be. I'm happier in this job than I have ever been. Every year I hold my breath with the funding.

I think part of the reason I love this so much is that I'm the only one who does full-day pre-k in the district. Nobody's constantly telling me what I have to do. I work really hard at it. I don't rip them off but I pretty much decide on what I'm going to do in here and that's nice. It's real nice. There's not enough hours for all the things I want to do with these kids. I have already made my calendar for next year, the different themes I want to do and things I want to cover during the year. And my primary goal for these kids is to help them develop a positive self-concept.

It's helped me in my personal life, too, having that focus in here. I guess when I finally realized that the self-concept was the key, I've always wondered, what if I had had a better chance growing up. I

was Olympic material for swimming. I really was but they didn't believe in me. I didn't believe in me. I wanted to swim the English Channel. I wrote Florence Chadwick. We became friends. She came to my town and I met her. She watched me compete and she said, "You can do it." But I didn't have the support. It's really sad but then I guess if I had done that I wouldn't be doing this and I think this is real important. I really feel like I'm making a difference now. I see my first class of little people now going into second grade and I see the difference in the kids I had. So I believe that this was what was meant to be, this time around.

I use a program by American Guidance Service called, "My Friends and Me." It's a whole program. The focus of the curriculum is self-concept. There's two puppets, "Can Do" and "Will Do." Just those two names alone, I think are real valuable. The lessons cover everything as far as science, math, and things like, getting along. In the beginning it teaches them how to make a circle, how to line up, and how to move to a space without bumping into each other. Every lesson has a focus of getting along with each other and doing things by yourself and feeling good about it. There's

a lot of little poems and chants, "Can do, can do, many things you want to, but I also need to think about you." There are constant little reinforcers and twenty-three different songs. I play the tapes during playtime and after just a few weeks, you'll start to hear some of these phrases in the classroom during playtime. I take it real seriously and the kids do too. This is our work and it's real important and nothing interferes with our "can do" lessons.

My aide and I have an attitude in here that we don't do anything for the kids. Sometimes it's been pretty hard. Maybe I've even gone over the line a few times. A couple of years ago, we were having granola bars for snack and one little girl couldn't get it open and I didn't do it. She kept working and she got it open. It took her a long time but she finally did. When it comes to art projects I show them how to do it and then I quickly get rid of the model, cause I don't want them to be copying me. We don't cut for them. We don't say, "You should put another eye up here." We just let them do it and they're really proud of their result. I don't push product at all because I think that's an infringement on somebody's self-concept. I praise any effort at all. I think that's probably the

key to it, accepting somebody the way they are and praising whatever effort they do. I find that they give you a lot more when you back off like that and just say, "That's really pretty. Can you tell me about why you put blue over there?" Sometimes they'll come up and they'll give you a painting that's completely black. I'll ask them, "Can you tell me about this?" Often, it turns out that it's been six or seven different paintings before it got covered with black and there's lots of other colors under it that you can't see. To them it's not a black painting. In order to see that, you gotta start with accepting in the beginning. We don't interfere constantly with behavior. I let it go a little bit and let them have some times to experiment and just test themselves. If somebody's having a hard time, I don't just run over there and say, "Well, what word should you use?" I want to see how they're going to work it out a little bit.

When I first started out and I'd read a book to kids, I would expect them to sit and be quiet. Now, if they sit and they're quiet, then I don't think that they like it and they're not interested. We stop and talk about the pictures and make the faces and talk

about the feelings. If we finish it and somebody says, "That was sad," I ask them if they want to change it. We change it into what they wanted to have as an ending, you know, the little boy went to live with his grandmother or whatever. I just let them take ownership in it.

The aide and I are here to facilitate but not necessarily to dominate. It's their room. We are a family. We have class meetings. People say, "Oh, your four-year olds don't even know what you're talking about." But we do. We sit down and talk about our choices and then they raise their hands to vote. We've made some pretty goofy decisions over the years that way but it's their decisions. In my life, one of the hardest things to do is to make a decision, because I am afraid of making the wrong one, and the consequences. And I think it's really good to be able to learn to make decisions when you're little; to have a choice and then make a decision and live with it. I want them to learn that if you can vote and you can get along with people, sometimes it's not a decision that you wanted but we make a compromise. They're familiar with that word.

Right from the beginning, it's established through Can Do and Will Do that in this classroom we all behave like friends. We talk about that right from the beginning. We hold hands around the circle a lot and we're all friends. I make a big deal about greeting everybody first thing in the morning, how happy I am to see them, so that they each feel special. I think that's real important. That doesn't come from the curriculum. The curriculum is pretty much pure lessons with an objective, a method, and materials. It doesn't give you too much as far as suggestions or follow-up activities. A lot of what I do just seems to be instinct.

A lot of times the parents will come in and say, "You know, whatever you're doing in here is really great because I'm seeing a difference at home." One of the moms came in and she said, "You'd better knock this off. My little girl keeps saying to me, 'Mom you're not listening, you're not cooperating.' They learn that if somebody really cares when you talk, they should listen to you or that you don't just tell somebody to do something, you talk about it.

I had a child whose father complained to me all the time, "I bring him to school clean. You send him home dirty." And I said, "Well, I told you right from

the beginning, this is not an OshGosh class. You don't dress your kid up--play clothes. Look at how I dress." And he said, "You don't know what you're doing. You don't teach nothing anyway." He slammed the door in my face and he went down and complained to (principal) that he was going to pull his kid out. And (principal) said, "Then go ahead. We've got about 40 more on the waiting list." But it's tough. In the beginning I was real intimidated. Now, I sort of have my feet planted here and I know what I'm doing and I really believe in my program. I don't find myself being so intimidated. It's been hard to get up the guts to say to people, "Don't do that in my classroom," or "could we talk about how you're disciplining your child? Maybe we could sit down and I could help you or give you some suggestions." Dealing with the parents is the toughest part. Some of them feel that they have to tell you their personal problems. You know, they got arrested for driving without a license or whatever is going on. I've said to them, "I'm not your counselor. I'm your child's teacher. (School counselor's) office is down the hall." I hate that part, to be honest.

I mean, getting involved with families is part of the job to an extent. We meet grandma and grandpa and

know the minute somebody's expecting a new baby and, we know where everybody is for vacation and I go to their houses for dinner. I bring kids to my house. I had a few come to my house and decorate my Christmas tree and make cookies with me. I do get really involved with the families but it's tough when that many people need you. It gets real tiring. There's always a couple who will put me down to my teacher aide. That puts (aide) in a hard position. We try to stand real united. We wear matching T-shirts a lot or we try to come on as a team. We're invincible. You're not going to split us up or cause friction between us. When we have our parent meeting at night time, she comes in and I introduce her. Right from the start, I say, "What she says, you may as well consider it coming from me because we're a team."

I get a lot of praise from people in the building and it's funny cause a lot of times on people's planning breaks, they'll come in here and play. They'll say, "I just needed to be with happy people," or "I just needed to be with good kids." Hardly a day goes by that we haven't had somebody come in and just kind of hang out with us to take a little break and visit with us. This year my first group of kids hit first

grade. Both of the first grade teachers were very enthusiastic and said, "Oh, Karen, I can see the difference with the kids that you had." And, you know, I always thought I could. When we go to a performance or something I could always just be so proud of the kids that I had.

We do a yearly May Day thing where we make about 1,000 paper flowers. We write, "Happy May Day, (school name) Pre-K," on them. The kids get all dressed up and we go all over the neighborhood. Each kid gets a coffee can full of the flowers that they made and they pick whoever they want to give them to. They'll pick lonely looking, old people sitting outside or they'll just go up to a house and knock on the door and sing our little two-verse song. They feel so good about giving. And we've gotten kind of known for that, "Oh, here comes those pre-k's." People wait for us on the street.

I do a lot of things in the school. I try really hard because it helps the pre-k too, to be on a lot of committees. I just show them that I'm not just this air-head who comes in here and paints and plays, that I have more to give. There's a lot of people that I guess I don't respect a whole lot as far as teaching

because they don't give or try as hard as I think they should. That's where my problem's going to be for next year because my favorite kindergarten teacher is not going to be here. My favorite second grade teacher is leaving, too, so MY KIDS are going to have people I'm not crazy about. It makes me a little nervous.

There's a friend of mine who works here who was bragging about not doing lesson plans. I listened to it for a few days and finally I said, "Look, how can you brag about that? That's a professional responsibility. If you don't have a goal for the day, how do you know where you're going?" A lot of times I'll just go up to somebody and say, "You know, I found this really great article in such and such magazine and I was thinking about you." Or else, stick things in peoples' mailboxes and that seems to help. It seems to help a lot. I kind of behind the scenes do things to try to change things a little bit. My kids do the same. There was a parent out in the hall just blasting a child last year and one of my little four-year olds walked out and went up to the parent and said, "You don't seem like a very nice mother." And coming from a little child like that, it just diffuses the situation.

And I give a lot of praise to other teachers, too. I constantly am telling people I like their bulletin board or their windows, whatever I can find.

I don't do Halloween. I think it's really stupid and after telling the kids not to talk to strangers, to encourage them to go knock on strangers' doors and take candy. Plus, we're a health food class. We don't eat sweets or drink chocolate milk in here and so instead of doing Halloween, I was kind of the out-law, I said, "I'm taking my kids on a field trip that day." And everybody else was, "Oh, we're having a big parade. It's tradition." A lot of people looked at me like, "You know, this is wrong, this is American culture here." I took my class out to (Agriculture College). We spent the morning in the farms, having a tour with the animals and the greenhouses. The kids got to stick their fingers in the cows' mouth, they watched a guy shear sheep, and he gave us a bag of wool to bring back for an art project, they stopped the silo loader and gave us a bag of the feed. We had a picnic lunch. These little munchkins had already learned enough from Can Do and Will Do that they were real upset when they saw litter on the college campus and they went to pick it up. We went over to the swimming pool and I asked

the pool director if I could take them down on the pool deck and show them cause they never would have seen such a big pool before. He ended up giving them a diving demonstration in his flannel suit. Then he put on his bathing suit and he did some really good dives for us. I took them over to the college library and I asked the librarian if I could bring the kids in and show them and she said, "Well, they're awful little. Do you think they can be quiet?" And I said, "Yeah. I think they can, if I asked them to." So they tiptoed all around and didn't make a sound. And what I was trying to do was plant the seed of, this is college. It's a nice place. There's a lot of fun things to do here. Maybe some day you could go to a college. I try to constantly tell them that you have to be something when you grow up. I try to just constantly show them things that you can be but that you have to go to school and learn to read first.

There was just so much learning that day. We came back and they wanted to make a cow out of the paper mache and that's why we did it. We wrote letters to thank the professors and we ended up sending them a copy of the video tape we had made that day. It was a good day for them, for me, and for the kids. Then the

kids started telling people, "I'm going to college." And some of the teachers were like, "Yeah, you don't even know what it is." And they said, "Yes I do. You live there and you learn to be what you're going to be." They understood and I think that most of them will be college kids. They've got that love of learning and they understand that you have to learn and that you have to be something. You just can't say, "Well, they're too little." You have to just go for it.

At our graduation show our opening number was "I Have A Dream." It was about Martin Luther King. I'm sure there were people sitting there thinking, "They don't even know who he is." But one of the kids came out and said, "This song is about Martin Luther King. He had a dream that everybody would be friends and love each other no matter what color their skin was." And they all got up there and sang and I truly believe that they know what that means. So, you just have to be able to, I guess, not be afraid to challenge them or to say things to them.

When people doubt me, I just tell them, come on in. Just come in and see because I have nothing to hide. I'm not trying to impress anybody. I'm just trying to give them some skills and some tools, mostly

so that they love school and that they stick with it and that they understand there's a reason for going to school. I want my kids to come here because they love it. I try really hard everyday to tell them what we're going to do the next day that they can look forward to because I do. I go home that night and I think, "Oh, good, tomorrow we're going to do this."

Out in the media everybody's talking about phonics and teach your kid to read, and get your kid into a day care where they're going to have reading and I think that's really a crime with America. They have to learn to socialize and to feel good about themselves before they can read. I don't think a lot of people realize how important self-esteem is or that it should be treated, in my opinion, just as seriously as reading and math and spelling. I think it's something that needs to be addressed on a twenty-four hour basis. It's just an attitude all day. It's not just with the lesson. It's with art projects or playing or going sliding on the hill out here; "I can't get back up the hill." -- "Yes, you can. Figure out a way to do it. Try it on your knees. We can pull you on the rope but we can figure it out if we try." It's just like a whole new way of thinking.

It's easier to teach academics when you use self-concept. Learning to make a circle is an academic skill in here. If I ask them to come and join hands with me and they don't feel brave enough or confident enough to come over and stand next to somebody they've never seen before, then they're not going to do it. If we have an artist come and want to dance and the kids are embarrassed or afraid, they're not going to do it. They're not going to learn from the artist. Whereas, if they're feeling, "Oh, good, this a new experience," or "here's somebody I'm going to play with today or meet today," then they're more open. With a positive self-concept, they're not afraid to try things, not afraid to make a mistake or to make a mistake and then fix it. If you don't have that feeling, you won't even try. I don't have any kids in here, after awhile, who will say, "Is this right," or "does this match this one?" They'll figure it out or they'll do it and then if I say, "Check and see if there's a different one that could go with it," they don't get all upset that they did it wrong.

They go to music. He has all kinds of hands-on instruments. He never once has anybody say, you know, "No, I don't want to do that." Nobody's afraid or

embarrassed and I think that that's because of what we do and the way we treat people and just our attitude.

We had a Schenectady Museum man came to give my kids a talk about the Planetarium before our visit and I cornered him in the hall and said, "I have four- and five-year olds. Are you going to be able to talk to them on their level?" And he said, "Well, there's fourth graders coming in, too." And I said, "I know. I'm concerned about that. Are you going to be able to use a blend of vocabulary so my kids will understand?" And he said, "They probably won't know what I'm talking about but as long as they sit there and they're quiet, I don't care." I said, "We won't be there." Our gym teacher does the same thing with every class in the school. I don't have a whole lot of respect for that. My kids should be doing developmental skills, not doing the same thing that the first graders and the third graders are going to do that day. Whereas, the music teacher does different things with my kids than he does with anybody else's and the art teacher does what they can handle.

I was good friends with one of the first grade teachers and I was constantly talking about this stuff and she went to the guidance counselor and said, "Is

there a curriculum like, 'My Friends and Me,' for my class?" He immediately plugged her into one and she's been doing it for a couple years now and she sees the value. So now the second grade teachers started a friendship club where they started a feel good about yourself thing. Fourth grade, the teacher takes some kids out to lunch every week and people are beginning to catch on that if the kids feel good about themselves, they get along better. If you teach them to feel good about themselves, they're not going to be looking for somebody to put down or to beat up. It's a lot easier to prevent than to deal with it later.

There's times when I don't have the energy, the physical energy, because I've got something on my mind. I try really hard not to but I'm sure that it does affect my teaching. I'll just tell the kids in the morning, "I'm in a bad mood this morning. I'm tired or one of my friends really hurt my feelings last night and I'm in a bad mood today and I'm sorry. I'm going to try to have a good day but maybe you could help cheer me up or maybe you could help my feelings." I just tell them right from the beginning. I don't tell them what happened but that my feelings are hurt today. Sometimes I come in when I probably shouldn't, cause I

don't feel good, but there's something that we had planned that day that I won't want to miss. Once we get our relationship established, they're really pretty good about that. If you tell them that, instead of brushing them off or saying, "no," they can understand. Sometimes they kind of take the burden off on days like that, cause they kind of take over. It's nice to see, cause if they're doing that here, they're going to do that in life.

I think that if you can give somebody the belief that they're valuable, that it's kind of like giving them freedom to have a good life.

We have a song, "I'm not so very tall. In fact, I'm rather small but I'm me. I'm as good as I can be and that's good enough for me." I sing that to them a lot when they're feeling down or when they're just having trouble with something. Did you do your best? Did you try? And when they say, "Yes," then I say, "Then that's as good as you can be." As they grow up, they're going to be better people. Maybe they won't abuse children, maybe they won't be drug users or hurt anyone, because they feel good about themselves. They don't have to prove to anybody how good they are by being tough or strong or bullying. I think that

they're going to be more creative because they have that freedom of feeling good and confident. I think they will have more success in school.

It just seems to be a whole new way of looking at things as an adult and a kid and I think they take that home with them and it helps in the family. It helps kind of change the atmosphere at home when the kid is not so dependent on the parents or not constantly crying, "I don't have anything to do," or "I can't do that," because my kids tend to be more self-sufficient and independent. I think that they're going to be better people, better kids and better adults. It's kind of a nebulous thing, in a way, to try to describe but I feel good about it. I think they feel good. They like coming to school. They have good attendance records. Good patterns are established because of the feeling in here. They tend to be more accepting and sociable because they feel good about themselves and they're open to making new friends or accepting people.

I've sort of taken it for granted, the last few years, since I made my big discovery. It's just kind of the way I feel now. I'm real grateful that I made my discovery. I've seen the change it can make in kids and myself!

When I'm doing a whole lesson on saying kind words as a way of showing consideration, for example, I start to think about it and I start to be a little bit more aware of the fact that being considerate is a nice thing to be and that a way of being considerate is to say kind things to people. I guess those days, I say maybe MORE nice things to people or find something nice to say to somebody that I might not have said anything nice to. It just becomes a way of life for me.

There's so much damage done by people who aren't aware of this stuff. I'm really glad that it's beginning to be a trend. I worry about it being taught by the wrong people or mishandled but I'm really glad that it's beginning to be more recognized.

I think it has to start in teacher-training schools. I think there's a lot of factors. I think that the standards need to be a lot tougher for teachers. I hate that saying, "Those who can, do, and those who can't, teach." I get real angry. I think our profession needs some respect so that teachers feel good about it. You can't just make everybody go to an in-service on self-concept and expect that to be the way. I think our whole system really needs to be revamped, starting with the colleges.

In Australia, teaching was a profession. We were respected like doctors and lawyers and it was really nice. Somebody would say, "Oh, what do you do?" And you'd tell them, "I'm a teacher." "Wow, that's great." So you felt good being a teacher and you weren't embarrassed. You didn't get teased or put down about your hours or the summers off or whatever. Whereas here, I've heard that saying more than I've heard in a life time. It makes me really angry. I chose to be a teacher. I knew I wanted to be a teacher my whole life.

President Reagan made teaching a political issue. He made it a re-election issue, putting down the teachers. He took the focus off drugs and the budget and everything else by the crisis in education and I was really angry at him for doing that. But we're a scapegoat for so many family problems. I think it's the breaking down of the American family that we are getting blamed for and we're suppose to be fixing everything.

I try really hard to be more than a teacher. I try to give back to the community. I volunteer at Tuesday in the Park to raise money for DARE. I worked at United Way and was a volunteer for months on the

Child Care Committee. I try really hard to show people that teachers don't just take their money and run, that we give back and we're an important part of the community. I think that we have an obligation as teachers to try to change the image by doing things like that.

I think the unions have something to do with it. In another state, we didn't have unions. It was a right-to-work state. In some ways that was better because they weren't on the news all the time about our contract or negotiating for money or whatever. When I first came here, the union made me real nervous because you're not suppose to come in, in the summer and work, you're not suppose to do this, you're not suppose to do that and people would really get on my case when I was doing things I didn't have to do. I said, "Look that's the way I am. You know, I'll join your union but I'm not going to live by it."

Teaching is not just a job. I look at it as kind of a way of life. I smoke cigarettes but I never smoke in the school neighborhood. I try really hard to be a positive role model. At three o'clock, we don't stop being teachers. I was at Price Chopper one day last spring, I ran into one of my kids and the mother and the little girl came over and she looked in my cart and

she said, "Oh, you're getting healthy food." I looked at her and she said, "Bananas and broccoli." She was evaluating the things in my cart and I thought why shouldn't she. Why shouldn't anybody I run into be able to look into my cart and say, "Wow, she doesn't just preach healthy snacks at school, she does it." It's a twenty-four hour job.

I'm constantly speaking out, you know, "Don't forget pre-k." You have to be an advocate. You have to stand up.

I get put down a lot by one of the teachers here, who is a jerk, for working so hard, "What are you doing that for? You're always doing . . ." I said, "You know, is it bothering you? Is it hurting you? I do it cause I love it."

Before I started teaching with a focus on self-esteem, I just would go home feeling, yuck, you've been so mean and negative today. Whereas, now that I've changed to thinking first about the child and the self-concept, I don't feel like that anymore. I go home and I feel good. At first it is hard and you have to keep saying to yourself, "Think about what you are saying. Think about how the child is going to respond to what you are saying, what they are going to hear from you."

The payoff is big. It's easier to teach with a focus on self-concept. We rarely have discipline problems. We go beyond the goals because there is a lot more time, for one thing. We don't have to stop a lot for problems, so we get through an incredible amount of things every single day. By lunch time, we would have done morning songs, read a story, the "Can Do" lesson, an art project, movement and dance, and probably a little bit of playtime or fine-motor time. It is a lot to do in two-and-a-half hours but we don't have to stop all the time and they are used to the pace. I just can't imagine not doing it the way we do. It just makes everything so much more fun. It really does. I love my job.

I never really loved my job before. I write in a journal. I was looking through it the other night and a few years ago, I had written this thing about how I don't have to worry how things went today because I can always move. Now, I don't want to move. This is the first time I think I have had a job where I'm not looking at the world map or the United States map and thinking,. "Where will I go next?" I feel good about what I do and I'm getting a lot back from what I do. I can't wait until school starts. I really can't. I'm

excited it's almost August. It's kind of a feeling like, you know, the school is still sitting here kind of breathing and it just kind of calls you back. I'll be here with bells on.

CHAPTER V

PRESENTATION OF DATA IN A THEMATIC FORM

In many ways, analyzing the data in terms of common themes was a very difficult task. The nature of my topic, self-esteem, rendered a group of very personal stories. I did not want to analyze the material in terms of psychological issues pertaining to the participants, though, indeed, I could have. Instead, my purpose was to examine what it meant to teach with a focus on self-esteem. I was interested in the issues that were significant to the participants in terms of their professional role as teacher. The following themes represent categories of such issues that were common to at least five of the thirteen interviews. The reader may find it helpful to look at Appendix E as he/she reads this chapter.

A. Commencement

Many of the teachers interviewed suggested that they always taught in such a way as to help build self-esteem, even before they were consciously aware of what they were doing.

Erin F. (5th grade) - "I'm a sensitive person and I've always cared that my students were happy or adjusted. I've always tried to have a healthy emotional climate in here; I didn't want to subject the kids to the torment that I suffered in school and at home. But I never really thought about it in terms of self-esteem. It was just sanity."

However, most could pinpoint a turning point when their focus on self-esteem became a conscious effort. There seemed to be three basic categories that these teachers fell into in this respect. Some teachers saw a real need in the children they were teaching.

Judy S. (2nd grade) - "At the time I was teaching in a special ed. class. It was obvious to me that the kids felt really different, really betrayed, upset and angry. Even though I had some skills to teach them, they just were having a really hard time. I began to realize that I had to make them feel better about themselves. Sometimes that helped and sometimes it didn't."

Cathy M. (3rd grade) - "I've been here twenty-one years. It was a time when there were two-parent families and, you know, a good family unit. Then as we started merging schools, we became a student body

(where) maybe half of our children come from one-parent families; messed up families, dysfunctional families, as they say. I would get excited about something they did and they would say that their parents didn't care, they'd just throw it in the garbage and stuff like that. So of course they had a lack of self-esteem -- they just didn't care. They didn't care about their grades. They didn't care about homework. They didn't care about how other children felt about them -- or they seemed not to care, let's put it that way. I felt they would succeed more if they felt that somebody cared about them. That's really how it developed."

Walt G. (K. teacher) - "People keep saying to me, 'Walt, you got to break their spirits. You've got to calm them down; they're wild. You've got to break their spirits cause if you don't break their spirits, Walt, they're going to be totally lost in school.' You know, and I said to myself, 'I'm here to break their spirit?' So many of these spirits have already been fractured and broken and I'm trying to mend them and put them back together. That's why I'm here. That's what it's all about."

Other teachers work in schools that have assumed a school- or district-wide focus on self-esteem, either

by adopting a self-esteem curriculum or by a general philosophy.

Fran H. (2nd grade) - "Two summers ago, our whole district participated in a week-long in-service to be trained to use Project Charlie. We were paid for it."

Pat P. (2nd grade) - "In this building, you just walk in and, you know, wow, this is a great place . . . We have meetings all the time about self-esteem and the general well-being of our students. Not just our students . . . our whole staff! Bus drivers, custodians, food service workers, whatever, it involves everyone. The adults model it. The principal models it. It just really comes across that people care about other people; people respect other people, whether it's adults or kids. We're encouraged to take risks, share ideas and help each other. We don't just focus on academics here. It's understood that personal involvement is part of our job. Everyone just knows it. People who live out of the district can bring their kids here and they do. It's great but it's also very demanding."

The third category is teachers who have gone through a personal journey to find self-esteem. In doing so, they have realized what a powerful and

positive difference it has made in their own life. As a result, they want to help children to develop self-esteem.

Erin F. (5th grade) - "In the seventies, I began going to a lot of workshops and women's support groups. The main focus of these groups was on defining ourselves by our own standards, instead of society's standards or men's standards. I know it sounds cliche, but I really had my consciousness raised, my confidence raised and, I guess, my self-esteem raised. (I also did) a lot of reading. I'm a different person now. Before, I always needed to please, to be accepted. Now, I need to please me. I need to live up to my own standards. (They're) high, high standards. But they are based on a human scale, based on me and my strengths and my values. I'm a different person. I realized how fucked up our society is. How oppressive and defining (it is). I want it to be different for children growing up. If they realize their own value and their own values, they're going to be okay. It's the most important thing that I can do for them."

Anne K. (4th grade) - "It came from me. And then I focused on the children. As I saw things happening for children, I looked back at myself. I searched for

information. I went to the library. I looked at my son. I looked at my husband and his background and how he was. A lot of self-evaluation. When I felt better about myself, when I made my family feel better, my students, my colleagues feel better, it just worked. And the attitude, the more I started believing, it was very powerful. Maybe spiritual. It just snowballed. It feeds itself."

By no means are these three categories mutually exclusive. For many of the teachers, there was a combination of situations that led to a conscious focus on self-esteem.

Erin F. (5th grade) - "Like I said, I guess I've always focused on self-esteem. But a couple of years ago, our district adopted Project Charlie. Now, it's not just something that's implicit to my teaching style -- it's also something I do formally. We actually do lessons with the purpose of thinking of ourselves and others, how we live and how we can be our best."

Cathy M. (3rd grade) - "So as I noticed the growing needs of our student body, I met with (principal) and (school social worker). Together we wrote a grant to get the Star Program here. Every teacher has the curriculum now. A core group of us met over the

summer to plan complementary activities. That was on our own time -- no pay. I can't say everyone is as enthused about the program as we were."

Joyce F. (3rd grade) - "There's a teacher on our staff who's very big on self-esteem. She did workshops for us. When she was leading those exercises for us, I think her purpose was for us to become more aware of ourselves so that we could see how important it was to kids. It was a circle effect -- my becoming better aware of myself and going back and reliving some things that I had problems with growing up, and then feeling that it was worthwhile so I'd go and try things in the classroom. For the first four or five years, it wasn't so much out of need coming from the kids, as that I felt it was something that was important. Now, I feel that it's something that I must do as well. More and more children are coming through that have a real problem with self-esteem."

Many of the teachers mentioned that their teacher education program did not focus on self-esteem and suggest that this focus become a significant component of teacher education.

Walt G. (K. teacher) - "Basically, we had all methods courses. I did have a psychology course but

that was mostly abnormal psychology. The education courses were really like intro-courses. They didn't do me any service. When you're in the classroom, you teach yourself and you grow very fast. It's been a lot of self-education."

Cathy M. (3rd grade) - "There needs to be much more of a focus on how to work with children, not just age-appropriate methods of delivering age-appropriate material. Teachers need to know how to make a child feel better about him or herself. We need that more than anything in this day and age. Teachers must come into the profession ready for this, rather than having to do a change of philosophy and style. People thinking about being teachers need to understand that that's what teaching is about. They need to learn how to help children."

Erin F. (5th grade) - "I'd love to see schools of education focus on self-esteem. God knows my program didn't. I think teacher-preparation programs should involve a lot of self-reflection, the way psychologists train. We need healthy teachers teaching the children."

Judy S. (2nd grade) - "We have to redefine what teaching is. It is not simply a body of knowledge that

you're going to pour into children. A teacher must be seen as a guide or a facilitator. Now, that may bring different people into teaching . . . it's a focus on skills and process, on teaching children how to acquire information and an attitude. Teacher education has traditionally focused on skills. It's got to focus on attitude too."

B. Self-esteem Curricula

More than half of the teachers interviewed use one of the packaged self-esteem curricula in their efforts. The various curricula are all set up differently but have a common purpose. They all contain activities that are designed to encourage children to think about the people they are as unique individuals, as members of a group, and about their behavior. Essentially, the programs are trying to promote positive self and other awareness and constructive, goal directed behavior.

Walt G. (K. teacher) - "It's a kit. There are two puppets, 'Can Do' and 'Will Do.' We have an activity book with 83 lessons, everything from forming a circle, to using positive words, to role playing a trouble situation. We have charts that go along with it and a tape with songs."

Anne K. (4th grade) - "I use the Pumsey Program. Finally, I had a program that showed me how to teach techniques that I used as an adult to the children. Cognitive processing kinds of stuff. The program is a series of stories and activities that go with the stories. The main character is a dragon named Pumsey. And the stories are successive, set up to show his journey with self-esteem. They're introduced to concepts like 'mud mind' and 'clear mind' and strategies of how to get into a clear mind. Concepts like peer pressure and appreciation of differences."

Fran H. (2nd grade) - "Project Charlie is divided into four sections: self awareness; relationships; decision making; and chemical use. You're supposed to do them successively. One skill area is supposed to build on the other."

None of the teachers who use the curricula see their effort as being comprised solely of utilizing the curriculum. However, two teachers credited their introductions to the curricula as a catalyst in changing their teaching styles and see the curricula as primary to their focus on self-esteem.

Fran H. (2nd grade) - "Our district began Project Charlie as a drug abuse, prevention strategy. We're

strongly encouraged to do the activities as part of our regular program. So we focus on our personal lives as part of what we do now. It changes everything. I mean how can I yell at a kid for not paying attention in math, when he just shared that he's worried because his grandmother is sick. There's a whole part on positive communication. It makes me think twice about how I talk to them."

Cathy M. (3rd grade) - "I see myself as becoming a kinder, more caring teacher. When I'm bringing this out in them, it's also helping me to be able to relate to them better. I think it's a positive change. I feel much better about myself as a teacher. I just seem to have a little bit more compassion. I'm still very strict. You'll still have to stay in and do your homework during lunch, but it has helped me to be kinder and gentler."

Other teachers suggest that the curricula serve as a structure for and support their efforts.

Walt G. (K. teacher) - "'My Friends and Me,' is just a skeleton -- it's a great program but the teacher and students are the muscles, the heart. The program offers the activities but it's up to us how we carry the ideas through into everything we do."

Ellen B. (1st grade) - "I've accumulated a number of (curricula) over the years. I don't use any one program religiously. I pick and choose. It depends on my mood, my class, and the particular needs that year. Most of them are set up to do in order. Maybe one year I'll try that . . . probably not. I don't think it's the same kind of thing like teaching the alphabet. You know, A before B, before C. It's just pervasive. It depends (on) what I do with it, how I introduce it, where I take it."

C. I'm O.K., You're O.K.

The most compelling theme that stood out in all of the interviews was the teachers' belief in the goodness of humanity. They all expressed the humanistic attitude of valuing all people, unconditionally. This attitude was a very conscious attitude. Whatever their method, all the teachers felt that it was their primary goal to help children to realize their value.

Walt G. (K. teacher) - "I keep using the phrase in here, 'No matter what anybody says or does to you, you're still a good person.' Okay, and we say that every day, just like we take attendance, we'll say that every day. When someone calls somebody a name, I'll

say, 'So-and-so, tell me that saying I say when someone tries to hurt our feelings.' And they'll spit it right out, just like clockwork."

Judy S. (2nd grade) - "You've got to treat students with respect, every day, all day. It isn't like you can turn it on and off. It's a whole atmosphere. That's what has to be there for it to really work."

Pam G. (3rd grade) - "If I only teach them one thing this year, it will be that they make a difference in the world. They've got to believe that the world is a better place because they're here."

Anne K. (4th grade) - "After the flag salute, we recite, 'The World is a Better Place Because I Am In It.' They are going to believe that. I'm going to do activities and they are going to have experiences in this ship, with this crew, to make that valid. If they believed that before, then it will be even more a part of their life. If they never even thought about it, then they will start to recognize that they are a person of value."

This primary goal was met by creating a classroom community where human experience was formally a focus and the value was made explicit. Children shared and explored their personal lives in the classroom. The

teachers felt that learning about being human and growing as human beings was a significant part of their curricula.

Joyce F. (3rd grade) - "I know them much better as people. They're not students, they're people. Before, there really used to be a barrier between myself and the kids, not one that I realized was there as much as I do now. That barrier really is broken now. They trust me now and I trust them."

Ellen B. (1st grade) - "When children come into this classroom, I want them to feel that they're loved. This is a safe place and it's a calm place. I want to establish a sense of being a family. So we really have to get to know each other."

Anne K. (4th grade) - "If a child's sitting in my classroom and they're wondering if their brother is going to live because he was stabbed and he's in the hospital, that child's not going to be able to digest things. In the beginning of my career, I wouldn't have been that tuned in -- you know, it can wait until after school. But now, I meet emotional needs first. 'The next time you think about your brother, you go down to the office and call home and see if there's a report.'"

Erin F. (5th grade) - "I guess if I had to put it in a nutshell, that's what I'd say it's all about -- sharing our experiences and the feelings we have about those experiences. Isn't that what being human's all about? These kids need to learn that their feelings are valid, that everyone has feelings. They have to learn how to act appropriately on their feelings. How are they going to do that when no one has time to just live with them. They're shuffled here, there, and everywhere. Their parents are busy and tired. They learn about being human from watching T.V. We need to teach them to focus more on their own experiences and each other's experiences. We need to show them that being human is about being. We've got to help them focus on their experience of being and to help them believe that that's what it's all about. We've got to have ongoing dialogue."

Fran H. (2nd grade) - "Teaching is much more personal for me now. I'm thinking more about them now. I know so much about them now. I'm actually dreaming about them because I worry about some of them very much. I tend to bring more of it home with me than I used to."

The teachers reciprocate this sharing of personal life in the classroom. They share their selves, their experiences, and their feelings with their students. They model human growth by showing their own growth and shortcomings to the children. The classroom is a real human community.

Cathy M. (3rd grade) - "Since we've been doing this self-esteem, I'm much more physical. I hug people before they go home, or in the morning. I mean I actually hug the kids now. That's something I <u>never</u> did! I also seem to be opening up more and letting them in to know me better, not just as a teacher but as a person. I mean I'm not a pal but they know that I have a daughter and that I shop and that I have feelings. I never really shared anything about myself before. I made it a point to keep it separate."

Joyce F. (3rd grade) - "I open myself up to them too. When my mother died, I went through a really rough time -- really, for the whole year. I let the children know when I was having an especially hard day. They saw me cry a number of times that year. They actually gave me a lot of support, you know, making pictures and writing cards, hugs, even just cooperating better. It's really a two-way street."

Walt G. (K. teacher) - "I can get emotional. I can cry in here. I don't have to be macho. I want children to understand that my feelings are part of who I am and that no one can take that away from me. (Principal) has come in the door a few times and seen me crying. There's nothing wrong with that. He's allowed me to be me in here."

Anne K. (4th grade) - "I'll come in on some days and say to the kids, 'I'm in a real mud mind today. I'm going to work real hard at getting back my clear mind but I just want you to know.' So many times adults take out their moods on children. And the children own it. This way, they'll know. And they'll know that adults have to work at it too."

Ellen B. (1st grade) - "One thing I do every year, after Christmas vacation, is have the children draw one thing that made me happy over vacation and one disappointment I had. Then we talk about it. I write mine too. It's important for them to see that everyone has problems. And that we can support each other."

D. Discipline

Many of the teachers reported a minimal amount of discipline problems. They did not expect perfect

children and saw misbehavior as a part of growing and learning. They considered their way of dealing with discipline as part of their focus on self-esteem.

Ellen B. (1st grade) - "I can honestly say that I have fewer discipline problems than my colleagues seem to. I'm a lot more tolerant than they are -- I don't expect them to be quiet or sit still. First graders don't learn that way. But I also think it's because they don't feel rebellious in here. They like being here."

Pam G. (3rd grade) - "I don't believe in sending my kids to the office. I believe in dealing with them the best I can deal with them because sending to the office, has such a negative connotation. Unless the kid is dealt with immediately, they just sit there and sit there and sit there and people look at them and the child learns everybody's business in the office and the office staff is resentful and it's like feeding a fire with gasoline or something. It's not good for anybody. In my classroom, I can deal with it immediately and it's not festering and it's not being prolonged. I make it a point to focus on the behavior, not the character of the child. And the purpose is always to repair the damage done. Then it's over. It's not

being taken home. Bygones will be bygones and we get on with business."

Some teachers tried to seize discipline problems as opportunities for teaching about human relationships.

Erin F. (5th grade) - "I often will get the kids involved. For example, a couple of years ago I had three boys that just wouldn't stop pestering . . . in some kid's eyes it was terrorizing, but more it was just pestering during kick ball. The three guys were pretty popular and their response to me was, 'But they love me, you know, they love me. The kids love me. What's your problem with this?' I said, 'That's maybe the way you look at it but I don't think that's what kids are really feeling. I think they're afraid because they do like you. They really don't want to hurt you and, yet, you're hurting them.' So I asked the kids in the homeroom, anonymously, to write down their thoughts about it; how do you feel when they break up your kick ball game or knock you down or say something? And I collected them. The three guys and I sat down and I said, 'I'm going to read you what your peers are saying.' They about died and then I said, 'You know, they like you, you're right. But this is

what they're feeling and it's just kind of an ache they have.' The kids couldn't do it themselves. They couldn't do it face-to-face. So I said, 'You know, I'm ripping these things up and I'm throwing them away but I want you to understand that sometimes people aren't really saying to you what they're really feeling but there are clues. Like this recess, aides complained about you or a couple of kids have said some things or they're kind of looking at you like, oh, let up.' The three of us meeting in a conference situation, privately, as opposed to standing up in front of the classroom saying, 'You three guys got in trouble, again,' really solved the problem. And it taught them a few things too."

Walt G. (K. teacher) - "I capitalize on a lot of teachable moments. Our classroom has a lot of freedom, a lot of social interaction, a lot of talking. There's always two or three occasions throughout the day that I say, 'Hey, Listen.' And we'll deal directly with something about how a person feels. It becomes part of your vocabulary, it becomes part of you."

In many ways, it seems that teaching with a focus on self-esteem renders discipline a non-issue!

E. Relationships with Families

It is not surprising that these teachers who become personally involved with the children also develop significant personal relationships with the families of their students. However, unlike their relationships with students, the relationship with families seems to be more of a one-way street. The teachers seem to take on almost a role of counselor or parent educator; parents share their personal lives with the teachers but the teachers only share the parts of their lives that are related to the children.

Anne K. (4th grade) - "I give out my telephone (number). I say to parents, 'Call me anywhere between 8:00 a.m. and 11:00 if something's bothering your child.' I have parents call me, 'Anne, you told me to call. So-and-so is having a hard time sleeping. He can't get to sleep. I know it's 10:30 but you said to call because my Josh is not feeling good about school.' I had a call one Sunday morning saying, 'My daughter just came in from the paper route and her friend had just been raped on the next street. What should I do?' . . . parents don't have anyone else to turn to."

Cathy M. (3rd grade) - "I have an attendance problem this year. Normally, I would not have been on

the case so much. But I went immediately because I knew she's (the third grader) staying home and taking care of the babies. I never would have known that in other years. So I met with her mother and told her that she couldn't do this. I hooked her up with the social worker. I just felt a need to do that."

Joyce F. (3rd grade) - "And so when I sit down with parent conferences, I have them share what some of their goals are and I share with them. We talk about academics but I also spend a lot of time talking about kids and their self-esteem. So many of my conferences this year, I've spent probably over 50 percent of the time talking about ways to build confidence at home, self-esteem, ways to be able to get kids feel comfortable with their feelings. Parents know that this is important to me. And they're intrigued by it. It's new to them. They see that it's working and they want to do the same thing."

Pat P. (2nd grade) - "I really keep an open line with the parent so that they will tell me when the kids are worried about something, whether they call me up and let me know or leave a note for me. Many parents will use my little journal that goes back and forth between myself and the kids and they'll write in

there. This one little girl, they had to put their dog to sleep, so the mother just jotted that in the journal. You know, Samantha is going to be a little bit upset and I'd keep an extra eye on her. Or, a grandmother was sick, they're anxious about the vacation that they're going on, or we're going to be out of town, you know, the baby-sitter is going to be there and that kind of thing. And those are good things to know because you can see why sometimes the behavior will change."

The teachers are not only involved with parents regarding the children but seem to extend themselves to help parents with their adult lives and their adult problems. The teachers seem to see their job of helping people to develop self-esteem as existing in all of their human relationships. Often the teachers need to refer the parents to the school social worker or school psychologist because they do not feel equipped to really help with the adult problems.

Erin F. (5th grade) - "Usually, when I hear that anger in that adult's voice, there's something going on personally or whatever; I try and hook them up. I try and get them to see the guidance counselor or, I take them aside and ask them, you know, 'What's going on for

you or do you need to share something with me,' kind of thing. I've had more parents just say, 'I can't handle it anymore,' or 'my boyfriend walked out.' So they came in here and they vented. Adults are no different than children. We all need to cry for help. If I'm committed to making a difference for children, then I have to be there for the parents too."

Judy S. (2nd grade) - "I find there's a lot more counseling with parents than there used to be. I used to focus strictly on academics. But now parents are coming to me with, my kid's not sleeping at night. And then it comes out that there's marital problems, alcoholism, whatever. You know, I'm old enough to be a parent to a lot of these parents. I don't know if I would have been prepared to cope with these problems before."

Walt G. (K. teacher) - "When I hear a parent saying something inappropriate to a child, I'll say, 'Oh, excuse me, but in this classroom, which is a safe classroom, we say it like this . . .' And I'll give a lot of the parents the same words as I give the children and I might also preface that with saying, 'I can hear that you're angry, okay, but if you need to talk to an adult or whatever, there's the guidance counse-

lor, the social worker's next door but please don't talk like that in here.' That's a soft way of reprimanding that parent. I usually will follow up with a note or if I see that parent later or the next day, I will tell them why I felt it was inappropriate for them to use that kind of language in here. And a lot of them, when you say it in a gentle, non-threatening tone of voice, so that they can hear it, they really appreciate it. That's usually the first time that they've been corrected in that form. In this community, the vocabulary is very negative, very threatening, very powerful, a lot of vulgarities, a lot of just putting down other people. You know, constant put downs and this is how they were brought up and this is how they're bringing the children up and I'd like to break that cycle. As I'm older, now, and wiser and more secure with myself, I don't care if that parent comes back and says, 'Well, you're not going to tell me what . . .' I'm not here for a popularity contest; I'm here as a teacher of young children and you've got to take the bad with the good. But like I said, I think if you do it tactfully, if you do it gently, they would rather hear that. By ignoring it, I'm letting a verbal abuse go on in the classroom and I would feel awful

about that. But by capitalizing on that, I'm using it as a teaching tool, also, and I'm letting the children know that I'm consistent with adults."

Not only do teachers get involved with the family lives of their students, but they also encourage families to be involved in their classrooms.

Pam G. (3rd grade) - "I think I have some of the best parent participation in this classroom. I'm working very hard, also, working on parents' self-esteem, cause if I want the children to have a good self-esteem, the parents need good self-esteem. This is a perpetual problem that we have in this school -- A family setting where the parents of these children are very young themselves; they've had bad childhoods; they've had low self-esteem. More moms will come in here and say, 'You know, I wish I had you as a teacher; I'd probably be different now. I'd feel better about myself.' So I tell them it's not too late. You can spend time in here!"

Walt G. (K. teacher) - "A lot of our parents come in with very, very low self-esteems. A lot of them have even said, 'This is why I was young and pregnant, because I was told I was no good or I'd never amount to anything or I flunked out of school.' So I get them

hooked up with a guidance counselor, with a family worker. I ask them to come in here; my classroom door is always opened to parents, to anybody. You know, I always encourage them from the first day they bring in the children, I've said, 'I would like to see you some time this year. I'm going to need your help. You're important.' I'm validating them from day one, not even knowing them or their past history. I'm saying you're the true teacher of your child. I'm a support teacher to your child's education. They live with you, they sleep with you, and they eat with you. You've had them for five years, they need you, they're going to need you now more than ever. You're going to have to stay in touch with what they're doing, with their teachers, with their learning. I've had more people, more parents, come in and learn the computer. It was very threatening to them to learn the computer, you know. I try and hook them up with community college, community health center. I try and be a facilitator in that respect; Head Start, other early childhood programs for their younger children. I invite them in for special occasions, for parties, for birthdays, for holidays, field trips; I never have a shortage of parents when I go on field trips, where other teachers will not take

parents. In fact, this year, I've had two parents who were elected officers on the PTO."

Ellen B. (1st grade) - "I'm one, if I have a parent that's a little skeptical about, maybe a way that something is being done or what's going on in the room or whatever -- sometimes people don't let that one be a room mother or whatever -- I do the opposite; I tend to bring the questioner right in, you know, and I've often had them be my room mothers or my helper with this or that and it's amazing how once they become involved, they can be my biggest advocate. This stuff speaks for itself."

Pat P. (2nd grade) - "I always teach with an open door; come on in, sit down, enjoy, listen to your kid read, lead a project, whatever you want to do, visit!"

Cathy M. (3rd grade) - "Usually, I have about five parents at open house. This year I had seventeen families. The kids were real excited about it because of the things that they've done in the room. They each had an 'all about me book' on their desk waiting for parents. There's also a lot more of their art work up around the classroom. They were very proud of themselves. I think their enthusiasm helped to get the parents here . . . usually, I feel a real teacher/par-

ent division. I'd carry on about academic expectations, homework, grading. I was more casual this time. I guess because I know the kids better so I felt more of a personal relationship with the parents too. It was more relaxed."

F. Focusing on Self-esteem and Academics

Almost every teacher mentioned their belief that the learning of academic skills and knowledge must be predicated on a foundation of self-esteem.

Walt G. (K. teacher) - "The most important thing I can teach these kids is the belief in their abilities. If they don't learn to believe that they can succeed in kindergarten, then they'll never want to come to school."

Judy S. (2nd grade) - "I can teach them to read, I can teach them to write, I can teach them to do math. But what good is it if they don't feel good about themselves. They've got to feel good about themselves if they're going to do anything with their learning."

Erin F. (5th grade) - "I want them to want to learn. I want them to love to learn. It's only natural for them to want to learn. How else can they

extend themselves? But they've got to believe in themselves first."

The teachers' belief in the primacy of self-esteem does not preclude a high value on academic learning. Most believed that their focus on self-esteem enhanced the academic program.

Cathy M. (3rd grade) - "I think they almost want to please me more as far as getting their work done and so on. I think people want to do things for people they know better, people they like. I'm getting more work out of them."

Actually, their focus on self-esteem was in no way separate from their focus on academics. However, the teachers were most interested in facilitating individual learning and less concerned with delivering a particular body of information.

Judy S. (2nd grade) - "I don't know how we bring education up to a situation where every child has the best. I don't know how we do that because I think that the best is different for different children. It has to do with so many things, you know, what's their ability, what's their interest, what is it they want to do, what needs to be encouraged and what needs to be discouraged. Everyone is different. But at the same

time, there is basic knowledge and there are basic skills that children need to know. You're not doing your job if you don't teach that knowledge and those skills for a child to build on."

Anne K. (4th grade) - "I plan so that every child is successful and challenged. Take math, I know that there are some children who very well know large numbers and so I want them to continue with that. I have to take it into account when I do the planning. There are some children that can't even read a large number so I would also, specifically, know in my mind that child A, B, and C need to work on that. I'm going to have to address that because I don't want them not being able to raise their hands. I don't want them to have a ditto sheet or an experience at the board or turn to a page in their book that is going to be a wipe out for them. I have to think about that. I may have to meet with them at different times. I may have to meet with children individually."

Erin F. (5th grade) - "If a child tells me 2+2=5, I'll say that's the answer to 2+3. I won't say, 'No, that's wrong.' So they don't hear that. I don't shut them down. That is just an example. Say, geography class, okay, the map is down and I ask, 'Does anybody

know where New York City is,' and they point to Buffalo. Then I would say, 'Well, I'll give you another clue based on your answer: that's the farthest place from New York. We need to get a little closer. Go South.' Always trying to let them understand that what they said was valuable. It was valuable that they attempted. And not to shut them down."

Joyce F. (3rd grade) - "I try to be able to have the kids set what they feel are realistic goals for themselves in the academic areas, okay. For kids that really feel that they are having some real major problems in math, we'll sit down and we'll talk about what are some things that they think that they're good at, what are some things that they think they can improve on, they set what they feel is a good goal for themselves and when they reach it, they feel successful. And I have found that by doing that initially, some kids are going to set themselves very low, as far as what the expectations for themselves are. As the year goes on, they start to raise their expectations for themselves. I think because of the fact that as I have gotten to know the kids better, they trust me. I can sit down and talk to them if I feel that they are not living up to what I think would be a good goal for

them. They'll push themselves a little. It's been happening in math with me this year. Some of my kids who really have had a very poor image of themselves in math and what they can do, have set extremely high goals for themselves. They were able to do that and they were able to achieve. My standards continue to be very high and I expect a lot from kids but I guess I work within the realism of what they can do and that has to be an individual kind of thing. And I think many parents will tell you that I have tough standards. Some parents think my standards are too tough. They're kind of surprised some times that the kids are able to achieve some of it."

Ellen B. (1st grade) - "If I were to teach the same thing to all children, that would be to imply that you were working with little screws and boxes and that when you put all the bolts and screws together, you came out with the same little shape every time. That isn't what we work with. The bolts and screws are all different because the children are all different and what they need to know is all different. I've looked at the different styles of learning for children. You know, some children want to know the structure, you know, what is it you're going to teach us today, what

are we going to do, how's the lesson going to begin, what's going to happen and now what's the middle? Other children want you to start and just flow, free. There are children who listen very well. There are other children who will read well and who gain far more from reading than they do from listening and those are just very, very basic kinds of learning styles."

Pat P. (2nd grade) - "When I let them take their own direction in learning, I learn from them things that I never would have realized before. I remember one little boy who was not such a sharp student. We were doing research on different countries. He decided to do Japan and he found out it was called the Land of the Rising Sun. He asked me why. I really didn't know so we looked at the atlas together and discovered it was the eastern most country in Asia. I'd never thought about it before. So I really learned from him. Years ago, I never would have had my kids do research. I was the teacher. Everyone learned the same thing."

Some teachers expressed feeling that their focus on self-esteem in some ways did compete with the need to teach the academic curriculum.

Cathy M. (3rd grade) - "At times I feel a very bad time pressure because in third grade it's extremely,

extremely important that you get the academics in. I've also got to get them ready for the PEP tests. I'm spending more time than usual about kindness and making choices and this and that and the other thing. I feel sometimes like I'm spending too much time on that and I'm feeling the pressure of not getting as far as I've been in previous years."

Anne K. (4th grade) - "So much of teaching is data driven. We've got to show results through test scores. Well, it's really hard to show all the work that I do with self-esteem through test scores. So at some point, I have to teach for the test. And that way of teaching is antithetical to teaching for self-esteem."

Interestingly, almost none of the teachers felt that standards and standardized testing should be abolished. Instead, they felt that they should be used as a source of information, rather, than as an ultimate measure of academic progress.

Anne K. (4th grade) - "The PEP's or the IOWA's should be used to show that students can meet minimum educational standards. We need to use qualitative evaluation, like portfolios, to show how a child is doing."

Joyce F. (3rd grade) - "The kids get very anxious about (the PEP tests). We don't do a lot of standardized testing in this district. Parents just zoom in on this one and put a lot of pressure on them. There is definitely preparation that has to go on so they know what to do. A lot of it is helping them to relax . . . I don't really have a major problem with them, though. This kind of thing is part of life. You have to have some common standards and see how you're doing. But those tests aren't really good indicators of what kids know or what they can do. They're just one piece of information."

Walt G. (K. teacher) - "I stood up to the principal last year. I refused to give (the IOWAS). I said, 'Standardized testing a kindergartner from this setting, (principal)? What's that going to prove?' I think they're okay in the later grades if it's used as a diagnostic tool. It needs to be used with other screening devices. It should not be used to evaluate where the child stands in the district, or in the state, or in the nation."

Judy S. (2nd grade) - "Standardized tests are expensive. That's my biggest quarrel. That money could be spent for books or field trips. Also, there

are children who don't show up well and others who look very good but don't have other important qualities -- perseverance, stick-to-it-iveness, the imagination, creativity. Standardized testing doesn't touch that and isn't that as important, or more so. (Standardized tests) are misused. People put too much reliance on them. They should be used more as an indicator of the schools than of the child. I can live with some standardized testing because the only way we know schools are doing their jobs is by giving these tests. We have to give so many of them. I understand it needs to be multiple choice and timed. But I think it should be considered an evaluation of a school. If so many fall below the norm, then first, you need to look at the population and see if there are needs that distinguish the population and needs that must be met and then look at what's happening with the teaching. But they should only be a small part of a child's evaluation. And by the same token, only a part of a school's evaluation."

Clearly, these teachers did not see their primary job as delivering a standard body of skills and information. Many of them mentioned their employment of wholistic teaching strategies that are designed to

address the affective development of children, as well as their academic development. One such strategy is "cooperative learning."[9]

Walt G. (K. teacher) - "Another way of promoting self-esteem in my classroom is, I teach and use the cooperative learning model. I've been doing cooperative learning now, for five years. I feel like I've been doing cooperative learning my whole life but I've never really put a title on it. It's an instructional strategy that promotes a variety of things between children. It's an instructional strategy that really does not use an individual approach or competitive approach; it uses the cooperative approach. It uses simple things like, eye-to-eye contact, okay. It uses knee-to-knee. It uses small groups. It's using one child's expertise, okay, with another child. Like for example, I don't do cooperative grouping with all children of the same academic abilities. I put in low

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[9] Cooperative learning is a teaching/learning situation structured by the teacher so that students work together to accomplish shared goals. Learning social interaction skills and developing self-esteem are implicit goals of cooperative learning. Knowledge and academic skills gain are also goals [Johnson & Johnson, 1975]. While there are many different structural designs of cooperative learning, all share Johnson & Johnson's [1975] conception of cooperative learning.

achievers, high achievers. Children are the best teachers, I believe, and they're helping each other. I usually do boy/girl, black/white, high/low. So it's a real random kind of a selection and they're called base groups. And I do my base groups in here at these round tables. Basically, we stay in our same base group all year. It's real interesting because sometimes, even the first day, I kind of in my mind, I start assigning them to base groups. We do change them within the first couple weeks because I don't really have a handle the first day in the academic ability but I, obviously, can see if they're boy/girl, black/white. And also, your sixth sense kind of tells you, just by their birthdays and just by how they're talking and things, where they might fall academically. We had a base group two years ago that I wanted to move a child from it because he was just being totally rude. Everything I did or said would not work and he was probably doing it for an attention-getter. After two weeks of this constant, constant, just turmoil, I said, 'So-and-so, I'm going to move you to a new base group.' Well, first of all, that was like the end of the earth because that child fell apart and the rest of the members who really were bickering with that child said,

'No, no, we don't want so-and-so to go. We love him.' And so, you know, when you see and hear things like that, it makes it really worthwhile to hang in there and work with it. Cooperative learning for me is wonderful. It teaches collaboration skills and collaboration just doesn't fall out of the sky; you have to work at things like that: how to praise one another; how to say please and thank you; how to look each other in the eye; how to sit together in a group; how to let other people kind of come into your space, you know, and share your space . . . and that little boy did learn to behave better. He had the support of his group. They really monitored his behavior!"

Pam G. (2nd grade) - "I went to a workshop on cooperative learning. You know Walt, well, he ran it. Cooperative learning is very good for children's self-esteem -- one is the recorder, one is this, and one is this. There are so many different jobs and everyone is important. They're more or less governing themselves."

Joyce F. (3rd grade) - "I've done cooperative learning a lot. I probably more consciously now, am involved with the way I group kids and why. I used to do more ability grouping. Now, I consciously set up the spelling, cooperative grouping with some kids that

can be very supportive to other kids. We, also, have groups of seven or eight kids that get together as a group to talk about their reading and about the books that they're reading and things like that. Again, that's consciously set up. They're going to be a community and they're going to be together for four or five months. We do the same thing in writing. So they work in a variety of different kinds of groups but the groups are definitely more conscious. I find that it's a very positive kind of experience for the kids, you know, just the way that they treat each other and their sensitivity to needs. I had some kids who really were, in the first month of school, very nasty to each other and that doesn't happen as much."

Anne K. (4th grade) - "For the past year, I've been doing a little more of what is new for me, cooperative learning. Children work together. In the last five or ten years, I can see myself, from going from assigning a workbook page to everybody, to maybe only assigning four things on a workbook page, or letting children select only four problems on a workbook page, or a text book page and I let them work together. I teach teaching skills so they're not just giving answers. It's not necessarily the quantity that they

do but the quality that they do. Today was a perfect example. I wanted the children to really define their math skills. I realized that this one child was really going to have trouble and she had never had a math book in her hand that was on grade level. I said, 'I'm giving her a math book that's on grade level.' She certainly can do some components of this. It will build her self-esteem to not be the only one in the class with a different book."

Another teaching strategy that is related to self-esteem that was mentioned is whole language. Interestingly, three of the four districts, that have assumed a district-wide focus on self-esteem, are adopting the whole language approach as their primary method of language arts instruction.[10] (I'm not sure of the fourth district.) The six teachers from these three districts mentioned their use of whole language. Only

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[10] Like cooperative learning, whole language instruction fosters social skills and positive self-esteem as well as knowledge and academic skills. Whole language teaches reading and writing by having children engage in "authentic learning" activities where they naturally need to use this skill. It is a philosophy of teaching from the whole to the part. Traditionally, reading and writing have been taught from the part/skill to the whole, though note drill and practice. The whole language approach is not limited to language arts instruction. It permeates all subject areas such as science, social studies and even math! [Bird, L., Goodman, K., Goodman, Y., 1991].

one teacher with an independent focus on self-esteem mentioned her use of whole language, though, many others discussed keeping personal journals which could, indeed, be considered a whole-language technique.

Ellen B. (1st grade) - "I've done a tremendous amount of reading on whole language. I really like the philosophy. It goes hand-in-hand with my focus on self-esteem. These kids see themselves as readers and writers. It's much (more free) than teaching skills and using workbooks . . . writing is an avenue to express their feelings; we talk about stories and how we relate to them."

Fran H. (2nd grade) - "Two years ago, it was Project Charlie. This year, it's whole language. We've had one in-service on whole language and this spring another one is planned."

Joyce F. (3rd grade) - "With whole language, the low readers don't see themselves as low readers. They all have lots of choices -- choices about which book-study group to be in; what free-choice book to read; they design their own research projects. I'm not teaching them to read or write. They're learning to be readers and writers! And they realize strengths and weak areas. We work on those together. We have

private meetings and discuss their choices and see if their choices are ones that will help them learn."

Cathy M. (3rd grade) - "We have a new reading series this year. It's whole language based. With this program, we can really tie in a lot of things with self-esteem. Like, one activity, where you draw your head and write six adjectives about yourself, positive adjectives. We sit in a circle and have civil conversations. A lot of the times, we'll talk about the feelings of the characters in a book we're reading. It really helps . . . I feel like I want to get away from the text books and more into these kinds of things. I, also, have learning stations around the room now. There are times during the day where children can choose what they want to do."

G. Colleagues

Discussion about relationships and interaction with colleagues surfaced in almost every interview. There was a common sense of feeling positively connected to colleagues in schools that had a system-wide effort to focus on self-esteem.

Fran H. (2nd grade) - "During the in-service, we had the opportunity to learn things about each other

that we'd never know otherwise. I was doing one exercise with the fourth-grade teacher about fears. Well, it turns out she is petrified of dogs. Of course, there is a history to it. Somehow knowing that makes me feel closer to her. I think we all know each other better now -- I mean we're not all best friends or anything, but the relationships are more personal, intimate."

Erin F. (5th grade) - "I think it's great that the district has taken on the curriculum. It's very validating to me and what I've felt all along is a priority. I know some (other teachers) used to think I was a radical. I guess I am. But this isn't radical. And now the administrators are with me. Not everyone takes it as seriously as I do . . . it's much more acceptable to talk about what I think is important now."

This positive connectedness was especially prominent for the teachers that taught in schools that had a general focus on self-esteem as opposed to those schools that had adopted particular curricula. These teachers seemed to realize how special their school climate was and they appreciated it!

Judy S. (2nd grade) - "There is no one in this building that I do not respect as a professional. I may not see eye-to-eye with them in our personal beliefs. Most of the people I really like, really enjoy being with, and I think they feel the same way about me. Most of my colleagues are teachers that I would like my children to have and that, for me, says it all. I can't think of anybody here that I wouldn't want my child to be in their room. My colleagues tend to be very professional people, people who keep up with changes in education. This is a district where a lot is expected of you. Our building doesn't empty at 3:00 o'clock. This is summertime and if you were walking around, there are a lot of people here and if you look in the rooms, it is obvious that people have been here off and on, all summer. There are people who spend their own money to go to conferences this summer. They are people who really try to keep up-to-date with what's happening, people who talk to each other, people who share -- there's a tremendous feeling of sharing. I think it's important when you hear people saying, 'Do you need, have you seen, have you read,' and very positive conversations about children, very positive conversations about children and that's helpful. The

kids aren't being put down. When you walk in the faculty room, you don't hear the complaining that I'm sure is evident in some other places. I'm trying not to be judgmental because everyone doesn't teach in a school like this. They don't have a parent walk in this morning and say, 'What can I do to help you?' Out of the blue, you know, that's the kind of parental support that we have. The kind of principal who comes in and says, you know, 'What do you need? What can I do to help?' That makes a big difference . . . It's really important for a district to treat its professionals in a humane fashion so that they can treat children in a humane fashion. You're talking about children's self-esteem but it, also, is important how I talk to the secretary. It's how the children listen to me speak with the custodian. It's my attitude toward how they behave when they're working with the cafeteria monitor. It isn't just my feeling about their self-esteem. It has to be a feeling that permeates all of us. I esteem them, they have to esteem me. That it's important for the cafeteria aide to treat them well but it's important for them to treat her well, also. So it's living together."

Pat P. (2nd grade) - "Kids can't give what they don't own themselves. Your staff can't either. By staff, I really mean everyone, whether it be a bus driver, custodians, food-service workers, whatever, everyone has to go along with this whole thing. Everybody has to feel self-esteem for themselves in whatever capacity they're working in the district and then they, in turn, should be showing that type of respect for each other. I would have to say probably a good 90, 95 percent of the time, in my observations, it really comes across that people care about other people, whether they're adults or kids. I think that makes me, myself as a person, you know, feel like I can even try some things maybe that I wouldn't have tried before because I'm made to feel that way. I think, then you share that good feeling with others, whether it's the children that you have with you, that you're teaching or your family or your neighbors. It just ripples out to everyone."

Joyce F. (3rd grade) - "The principal I had for seventeen years was very big on self-esteem. My new principal is also very big on self-esteem. I think it's a criterion for hiring in this district. They like us to share what we do with each other -- build

on each other's ideas, support each other. If somebody comes in and sees I'm doing a family meeting, they'd probably join in. The administrator would even sit down and join a family meeting -- not just the principal, but the superintendent . . . I really have support here. Yesterday, after I was dealing with all those problems, (an alcoholic parent and a behavior problem with one of her students) the principal came and said, 'Do you need a break? I'll cover your class for awhile. Can I do anything?' The social worker wrote me a letter today and said that she just appreciated what I had gone through, could she be of any help. You know, those things all are part of the fact that I can keep on going because I know that people will do that. I don't know how people can do it otherwise."

One teacher's experience is markedly different. Cathy M. is the teacher who wrote a grant to get a self-esteem program into her school. This was her school's first year. Concurrent to implementing the self-esteem program, this year was the first year that many inner-city children were bused into her school because of changes in the district. The transition, clearly, has not been without difficulty.

Cathy M. (3rd grade) - "The six of us who worked on the program over the summer got very close. I think our whole staff was excited to try the (STAR) program. But now, people feel burdened. It certainly wasn't magic, not that it should be. I know it will take a few years to make a difference. But with the quantity and type of children we have here, many don't have the energy. I think they may even resent me. Some of the core group isn't even as committed anymore. (The principal) believes in the program. But that just makes them mad. They want her to be a hard disciplinarian with the kids. I guess our self-esteem is a little bit low. We feel like we're failing."

"Lone ranger" teachers, the teachers who focus on self-esteem within more traditional systems, expressed a common sense of isolation. Yet, their isolation was not bitter. They felt so committed to what they're doing for children that they feel satisfied. They believe so strongly in what they're doing that they want to spread it to their colleagues in non-threatening ways.

Walt G. (K. teacher) - "It feels lonely at times but I don't care because I'm here for the children. It's still that part of the 60's in me, you know, I'll

do what I feel is good for the kids and if it means not being liked by certain people because I'm not playing the good, old traditional, you know, on the stage, in front of the classroom teacher who wants all the power, so be it. You know, I'm still very cordial to those people. Because they know I don't go into the faculty room, I get a lot of people come back and say, 'Well, so-and-so said this about you in the faculty room.' I really don't care. My commitment is to the children and their families here. I know who my friends are and I know they're the ones that matter to me."

Pam G. (2nd grade) - "I'm always looking out for my self-esteem. Now that I'm older, I can look out for it. I try and avoid situations that might be damaging to my self-esteem. I screen people. That's one of the reasons I don't go into the faculty room. I mean, you know, not only are kids talked about but teachers are talked about. There's a general attitude that I need to stay away from. It's a real downer."

Anne K. (4th grade) - "I realized I had to avoid serving on committees with the drag-downers. I don't go to the faculty room when those people are there . . . You end up, not so much isolated but you insulate yourself, which can sometimes be isolating. But I

gravitate towards people who have my same philosophy, people who are positive and who believe in the children, who are willing to go that extra mile for children. And then we keep each other energized."

Ellen B. (1st grade) - "It's obvious that if you are spending more time with your students, having special, private lunches at lunchtimes, greeting them as they come in, in the morning, talking with them after school, that you just won't have as much time to be with the other teachers."

These "lone rangers" did not limit the scope of their focus on self-esteem to their own classroom. Ironically, though they felt that their focus in some ways isolated them from their colleagues, their focus was an avenue by which they established some leadership in their school.

Pam G. (3rd grade) - "I know that (the teachers) listen to what I say in faculty meetings. My approach always focuses on the child's needs. They may not like my suggestions but they, also, know that children behave when they're with me. I really don't have the problems that they do . . . I try to show them how I talk to children whenever I have the opportunity."

Ellen B. (1st grade) - "I always share good articles with the staff, or new ideas, sweet stories . . . I, also, treat them with the same respect that I do my students. Teach by example, that's my motto."

Walt G. (K. teacher) - "I've encouraged the other kindergarten teachers to use, 'My Friends and Me.' They've come in and said, 'Gee, Walt, I really like what's going on in your classroom.' I tell them that they can do it too. Start with the curriculum. The guidance counselor agreed to get them a kit. Now, we'll have one in each kindergarten. Next, we'll have to work on the first-grade teachers."

Anne K. (4th grade) - "My goal is to pass the baton. To do in my profession all that I can do, learn all that I can learn, and to continue to make others feel good. If I can do that for my colleagues, then they will make children feel good."

H. Job Satisfaction

The teachers all were extremely dedicated to their work and considered their work to be important work. Many expressed how much energy and time they expend in teaching as they do. Four teachers mentioned some frustration and concern with the difficulty of their

work and that teachers need to get more recognition for the work that they do.

Interestingly, two of these four (Judy S. and Joyce F.) were from school districts that have a general focus on self-esteem and that seem to have community support and respect for teaching.

Judy S. (2nd grade teacher) - "I would wish the people knew what we really did. I don't think that people really know what it is that we do. Teachers don't tell people what they do and unless someone comes into your classroom they have no idea. They have no idea of the kinds of skills that you're being asked to tap into. You're constantly an evaluator. You're constantly a creator because you're coming up with a new way to present this and that so it is interesting and understandable. You're constantly developing the child's personality and the child's feelings about themselves. People do not understand what we do as teachers. We think everyone does because everyone went to school but they don't. They don't understand what it is that we do. They have no idea that we work so hard."

Joyce F. (3rd grade teacher) - "Over the years there's more and more responsibilities that have crept

in for teachers. Teachers are dealing with the total child. It is reaching the point that a lot of people are feeling very burned out about it. I think that education is going to have to take a real look at that because some real quality people who can make a difference in kid's lives, because of everything that they are expected to deal with, are getting burned out or getting very hassled and very frazzled. And I don't know how to solve that but it definitely is becoming a problem."

Pam G. (3rd grade teacher) - "There's more and more of a cry for teacher accountability but there needs to be accountability on the part of the community too. We're expected to do everything. I know I will never take any other turn but I tell you there are times that you do wonder, as far as is there something else that you can do that you can make a difference, that's not going to be self-exhausted. I know people that are younger than I am are thinking of that."

Anne K. (4th grade teacher) - "I do what I do for me -- it makes me feel good. But I wish there were more appreciation for what I do for children. People should walk in a teacher's shoes for a day. Then they'd realize . . ."

Certainly, the sentiments of these four teachers reflect some personal stress and discontent with the way the teaching profession is regarded in our society. Certainly, this influences their job satisfaction. Nonetheless, the four of them, as well as the other nine teachers, all expressed exuberantly a positive attitude about their work. All felt hopeful about the potential of education to improve our world. Many expressed that they <u>loved</u> what they do and that they feel personally fulfilled by their work as teachers. This job satisfaction seemed to be related to their focus on self-esteem.

Walt G. (K. teacher) - "Children are our only natural resource left in this world. We need a major overhaul in our society. It's easier to teach children than change adults. This is my mission."

Ellen B. (1st grade) - "It's validating to me when I see children growing, becoming more competent people, being able to identify feelings, cope with the feelings, work the feelings out in a positive way, and feel good about themselves. That makes me feel great. That makes me feel great!"

Pat P. (2nd grade) - "It takes a lot of energy. I'm really tired at the end of the day. When I think

about it, it's like, WOW, I really have an impact on these kids. I really make a difference. It's really kind of scary."

Fran H. (2nd grade) - "I like my job much better now. In some ways, it's harder. I'm much more conscious about everything I do, not just in the classroom, but in my personal life too. I'm probably a healthier person all around now."

Judy S. (2nd grade) - "I think it means that I feel successful about what I'm doing. I see children who are both learning and happy. I see children that I believe see themselves as learners. That they see themselves as teacher, also, that I'm learning from them. I guess it really means that I'm pretty happy with what I'm trying to teach. I have children that I run into on occasion that say, 'Oh, you know, I really liked being in your class. You were my best teacher.' I don't mean that in a sense of a popularity contest; that's not what I'm saying. What I am saying is that they look back and they see their school situation as a time that they learned and that made a difference. Also, I see myself as learned. I'm in a situation where I feel good about what I'm doing. I, also, see myself as an ongoing learner. I learn from every child

that I come in contact with. There's something else that I found out about children, some other little key that fits, you know, something that clicks. And that's why every year is different. Every year you have different children, so every year there are different learnings."

Pam G. (3rd grade) - "Hopefully, they will be better citizens. Hopefully, they will be able to function and have jobs and not rely on welfare. Hopefully, they'll have goals and reach those goals and reap the rewards."

Joyce F. (3rd grade) - "It means that I'm very tired at the end of the day. I've had to make some sacrifices because it involves a lot more of my time. It's a lot more difficult to be able to do a combination of really concentrating on academics, as well as also working with the total child, inside and outside of the person. So it's a lot more energy and I'm tired, probably more so than I used to be. It has nothing to do with age...Ha! But it's also, I think, a greater sense of satisfaction. I could never go back to not working with the whole child and the whole picture. Even though it is that much more difficult today, I could never go back to doing it that other

way. I'm learning more and more and every year I just try to be able to take what I've been experiencing and add on to what I'm doing. So I'm constantly growing."

Cathy M. (3rd grade) - "I don't think I was ever that great of a teacher. Now, I feel very comfortable. Yes, I feel very proud of what I do. I guess I feel that I'm affecting kids in a much more positive way now and I feel that it's not just with what I'm teaching, the academics. So I go home exhausted but I never wake up in the morning without looking forward to the day. That's true more so now than twenty years ago. So I guess that feeling of really feeling that I'm doing something and that it's something that's worthwhile has changed my outlook, as well as how I see myself in working with kids. I guess, you know, I love what I do and I guess it's just the fact that my day is very meaningful to me. I think that it really has a lot to do with the fact that I know my kids. I try to do the best I can for them and usually each day I can at least think of something that is truly satisfying that I have done. I feel in some small way that it means something."

Anne K. (4th grade) - "It does mean coming in early and staying late. It's just something I thought

every teacher did . . . I would like to say that I am repaid financially for the many things and the many hours that I spend really assessing and delving and planning for success as much as I am paid, or as little as I am paid, for the other components of my teaching but I am not. I really believe now, especially in the last two years, that what people do as a people and what we do as individuals, we do because it makes us feel good. So I do it because it makes me feel good."

Erin F. (5th grade) - "School is like a microcosm of society. If children feel good about themselves and are happy and successful in something they do, then they're going to grow up and contribute to society. If they learn to care about each other here, they're going to care about people out there . . . Self-esteem is the key to a healthy, productive life. It's not a job for me. It's my life. It's made a difference for me. It can make a difference to them. It can make a difference to our world. I guess I want to make a difference."

CHAPTER VI

REFLECTIONS ON THE MEANING OF THIS STUDY

The research method employed in this study was phenomenological interviewing. As discussed earlier, this method carries certain epistemological and ontological assumptions. Thus, if this research was successful, each reader will have gleaned meaning about the phenomenon of teaching with a primary focus on self-esteem from the words of the participants. Nevertheless, I shall present my own analysis of the data and the significance, or meaning that I have found from my work.

I shall repeat the formative questions which guided this study to help orient this meaning-making with the intentions of the study: What is it like for teachers to have a primary focus on self-esteem and the personal, psychological development of their students within the larger bureaucratic structure of the traditional institution of school? What are the individual as well as common practices, dynamics, issues, motivations, ramifications of such an approach? What are the necessary skills and how does a teacher develop these skills? How does the humanistic teacher meet the

individual personal growth needs of each student and still teach to a whole class of children? How does s/he integrate the need to teach mandated, common knowledge and skills with his/her focus on each child's unique interests, readiness and style? What meaning does the experience of teaching for self-esteem have for teachers, the institution of school, and society at large?

While I feel that my narration of participants' stories addresses these questions, I shall further examine these questions by discussing the themes that emerged in my organization of the data. The commencement of teaching with a primary focus on self-esteem was varied. Some teachers came to their focus on their own, often because of their own, either newly developed or lifelong, high self-esteem. Others were "conscripted" or drawn into the focus by their schools. Whatever the initial entry, for all the teachers, there existed a synergistic relationship between their personal focus on self-esteem and their professional focus on self-esteem. It is perhaps the consciously personal involvement with teaching that marks the commencement of teaching with a primary focus on self-esteem.

Though humanistic theory and literature would suggest that a teacher must possess high self-esteem in order to help children to develop high self-esteem, this may not necessarily be the case. While certainly a teacher's self-esteem is positively related to his/her students' self-esteem and is important, a teacher may begin to examine and develop his/her own self-esteem as he/she recognizes and addresses the dynamics of self-esteem in children. Such an occurrence supports the idea that self-esteem curricula can be effective. While many "pure" humanistic educators would scoff at the idea of a curriculum guide for teaching self-esteem, the curriculum may well serve as a catalyst for some teachers towards a more humanistic approach to teaching, including developing personal relationships with children. This was indeed the case with some of the teachers interviewed. Furthermore, many of the teachers found the various curricula to be very helpful and supportive to their efforts.

With or without a curriculum, it was clear that the essence of teaching with a primary focus on self-esteem was the interpersonal relationships that developed between the teachers and their students. These teachers love their students as Fromm [1947] defined

loved. They also sought to be loved by their students. Many of the teachers needed to consciously examine and develop their own interpersonal skills.

In becoming personally involved with students, teachers became involved with childrens' families and often family problems, extending their jobs, often beyond their training. This may cause stress for teachers. The situation needs to be further explored and addressed in teacher training and the school systems. Nevertheless, most of the teachers seemed willing to include parents in their focus on self-esteem.

Perhaps one of the most significant outcomes of this research is the illustration of how much the teachers value childrens' learning of shared academic skills and knowledge. In its infancy, humanistic education denounced the teaching of common skills and knowledge. This history contributes to a common, though non-research based, criticism of teaching with a focus on self-esteem that it precludes a focus on academic excellence. This simply is not the case. In fact, there are striking similarities that I have discovered between the practices employed by teachers in the name of self-esteem and those endorsed by the

popular and more mainstream effective schools movement which pursues academic excellence.

Edward Fiske [1991] recently published a book detailing effective schools and effective practices. The goal of these schools is to teach students to think for themselves; to be able to generate new information for the demanding fast-paced jobs of the future; and to be productive and participating members of our democracy. Practices of such schools include giving power to influence decisions about school to teachers, parents and children; getting children to take initiative and responsibility for their learning; individualizing instruction based on children's needs; focusing on strengths and interests; and restructuring the time, space and organizational procedures of schools based on community needs. Fiske also suggests that effective schools are able to show successful outcomes of these practices.

Like the humanistic education movement, the effective schools movement denounces the traditional bureaucratic infrastructure and the traditional pedagogy of the schools as outdated and ineffective. Another commonality includes a declaration of the high-level, professional skills needed to teach in a more

effective manner and an insistence on greater status and compensation for teachers. After all, if teachers by definition are doing more than delivering a standard curriculum, they deserve to be recognized for the higher level of work. However, despite the similarities, the effective schools movement is more like a revitalization of John Dewey's progressive education. While humanistic education accepts the progressive model and the effective schools model of pedagogy, central to humanistic education is a belief or faith in and commitment to the value of human being. It is this belief and mission that makes humanistic education, or the job of teaching with a primary focus on self-esteem, distinct.

The effective schools model and Dewey's progressive education define the purpose of education as preparing children to be productive in our society. While both models probably assume and definitely facilitate the development of the constructive, unique, and creative potential of each individual, this value is not the driving force of the models. According to the effective schools model's rationale, if our mode of production or government were to change significantly,

it would seem that the purpose and practices of education would also change.

In contrast, humanistic education teaches the qualities of independence, team building, decision-making skills and critical thinking because of a belief about what it means to be a human being. The purpose of education is not to drive our economy (although this result would still be a by-product of humanistic education). The purpose of education is to help children to make the most of their human potential.

Humanistic teachers allow students to make decisions about classroom procedures because they believe that the children's input is valuable, rather than to give them practice in decision-making skills. Humanistic teachers not only focus on the individual learning styles and interests of their students so that their students can be successful in our society, they want to teach children to value the fact that there are individual differences in style and interests.

Humanistic teachers not only welcome parents' involvement in their childrens' education, they also become resources or support people for the parents of their students. Humanistic teachers have pursued the

study of human well-being. They see their jobs as realizing the potential for well-being in all people.

Humanistic teachers see schools as serving the needs of the people or community, or humanity, rather than serving the needs of society. Nonetheless, they understand that people need to fit into a larger whole. To this end, they are able to wed a focus of teaching common skills and knowledge and a focus on self-esteem.

I was surprised by the extent to which these teachers supported the need to teach a common curriculum; they even accepted the need for some standardized testing!

The thirteen teachers that I interviewed are teachers that feel so committed to teaching with a focus on self-esteem that they were willing to give me over six hours of their time. Probably related to this commitment is the fact that most of them have developed high self-esteem for their selves. Clearly, the teachers that were helped to do so by their school environments felt lucky and supported and gathered strength from their situations. This is the ideal. Teachers who were not in supportive climates did express some sense of loneliness. However, even they seemed to gather strength from their mission and even

considered themselves to be leaders in their schools, rather than outsiders. Their high self-esteem and belief in their mission sustained their efforts. These qualities also sustained a unanimously high sense of job satisfaction and a serious dedication to teaching.

Certainly, it is teachers like these that should be teaching our children.

Clearly, teaching with a focus on self-esteem requires certain skills and knowledge and attitude. While many of the teachers interviewed developed skills, knowledge and attitude by their own initiative, time and often money, it seems to make sense that such learning be part of the teacher-education process (and then supported by the schools' systems for practicing teachers). Students preparing to be teachers should be exposed to the literature of humanistic psychology and humanistic education. They need to develop their own repertoire of strategies to help children to recognize their value and to help them to see how their selves fit into the larger society. It seems clear that there is no one method that comprises the phenomenon; instead, there seems to be a variety of constellations of methods. There is confluence in terms of an attitude or the belief in the humanistic paradigm.

I have been personally touched by conducting this work. I feel truly inspired from getting to know the participants in this study. As a group, these teachers are committed to their profession; they are committed to children; they are committed to humanity. These teachers share the humanistic attitude and belief in the unique value of all people and have dedicated their lifes' work (and sometimes their lives) to realizing this belief. The experience of conducting the interviews, of forming relationships with these teachers was very refreshing and stimulated my thinking about my own humanity. I cannot explain the freshness, and resulting motivation, of being with a person with such reverence for humanity.

Knowing the effect that these teachers have had on me, I feel hopeful that these teachers will make a real difference in the lives of children. One of my "assumptions," as I entered the research, was that there are too many children growing up today with a lack of self-esteem and a lack of human-esteem. I believe that this problem threatens the continued existence of human kind. I also believe that teachers are in a unique position to address this problem. I have learned that teachers can and are addressing this problem. Further-

more, the infrastructure of schools seem to be transforming to accommodate more humanistic approaches to teaching and learning (though it may be in the name of "effective schools," rather than the humanistic paradigm).

I believe that as a society we must improve the status of the teaching profession. As Fiske [1991] suggests, effective teachers must be fairly compensated for their "new, more professional work"; so must humanistic teachers.[11] The humanistic teachers work very hard and their work is demanding and exhausting. It was telling that none of the teachers lamented their salaries. Instead, they desired understanding, support and appreciation. These teachers practice what they preach; they want to be recognized for their unique contributions to humanity. If I were to impose meaning on this research, I would emphasize the need for such recognition. Humanistic teachers are one of our best hopes to ameliorate the dismal and deleterious state of childhood (and even adulthood) in our society!

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[11] As I suggested earlier, I believe that good teachers have always been effective and humanistic teachers. However, those qualities were not, and probably still are not, explicitly recognized in our cultural definition of teacher. The American Heritage Dictionary's current first definition of teach is "to impart knowledge or skill to; to instruct."

APPENDIX A

A COMPARISON OF OPERATING PRINCIPLES OF THE ASSOCIATION OF HUMANISTIC PSYCHOLOGY

1961 Principles

1) A centering of attention on the experiencing person, and thus a focus on experience as the primary phenomenon in the study of man. Both theoretical explanations and overt behavior are considered secondary to experience itself and to its meaning to the person.

2) An emphasis on such distinctively human qualities as choice, creativity, valuation, and self-realization, as opposed to thinking about the human being in mechanistic and reductionist terms.

3) An allegiance to meaningfulness in the selection of problems for study and of research procedures, and an opposition to a primary emphasis on objectivity at the expense of significance.

4) An ultimate concern with and valuing of the dignity and worth of man and an interest in the development of the potential inherent in every person. Central in this view is the person as he discovers his own being and relates to other persons and other groups.

1988 Principles

1) The support of humanistic philosophy, theory and research, in order to promote a humanistic impact upon the development of knowledge in our society;

2) the development of human potential, to provide AHP members and others with opportunities to enhance their own lives and their interpersonal and developmental skills;

3) professional development, to provide AHP members and others with opportunities to introduce and develop

continued...

APPENDIX A continued...

humanistic principles and skills in their work;

4) humanistic activism, to introduce humanistic principles into public policy decision making and to have a positive impact upon world peace, social justice, planetary survival and other important issues that confront humanity.

APPENDIX B

A.S.C.D.'S LIST OF DEHUMANIZING PRACTICES COMMON IN EDUCATION

Educational Imperatives In Nurturing Humaneness

1. The marking system and
   a. The competition it inspires
   b. The comparisons it makes
   c. The pressure it creates
   d. Failure
2. Corporal punishment
3. Overcrowding and resulting
   a. Class loads
   b. Easy anonymity
   c. Shallow teacher-pupil relationships
   d. Loss of privacy
4. Curricular tracking and
   a. The caste system it nurtures
5. Inflexible and non-variable time schedules
6. The scarcity of legitimate postgraduate options and
   a. Pressure to attend college
7. The "single text" approach and
   a. The conformity it demands
   b. The boredom it creates
8. The grade-level lock-step which ignores what we know about the ways in which unique selves develop and
   a. Accompanying imposition of single scope and sequence schemes
9. Misuse and misinterpretation of intelligence, achievement, and aptitude tests
10. Testing instead of evaluating
11. Teacher evaluation of students
12. Failure to reflect teacher responsibility for grade or mark "achieved" by student
13. The "objectivity model" which prevents meaningful relationships from developing between teachers and pupils
14. The ignoring of the principle of "feedback readiness"
15. The "right" answer syndrome
16. Misuse of cumulative records
17. Demonstrated distrust instead of demonstrated faith.

APPENDIX C

INTRODUCTORY LETTER/REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION
UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LETTERHEAD

January 15, 1991

Dear Elementary School Teacher:

My name is Ronna Tulgan and I am a doctoral student working on my dissertation. I am in the Psychological Education Program at the University of Massachusetts in the School of Education. I am researching the dynamics of teaching with an effort to improve self-esteem. My goal is to develop an understanding of this phenomenon by studying the experiences of teachers who have made a conscious effort to integrate the objective of self-esteem improvement into their teaching. I have learned that (you are such a teacher) (that your school has incorporated a focus on self-esteem)

I am looking to interview teachers who have indeed made such a conscious effort. Anonymity will be kept in all the interviews. If you have made a conscious effort to integrate the mission of self-esteem improvement into your teaching, I would really appreciate the opportunity to learn from your experience.

I have enclosed a questionnaire and a self-addressed, stamped envelope. I would greatly appreciate it if you would please fill out the following information. Ultimately, I am looking to interview teachers who teach with a focus on self-esteem. If you indicate that you might be interested by checking "yes" on #___ on the response form, then I will get in touch with you so that I can more thoroughly discuss my research and my request for your participation.

Thank you,

Ronna Tulgan
Home #453-6073 - 11 Fairlawn Ave., Albany, NY 12203
Work #372-1622 - Cornell Cooperative Extension,
Schenectady County, 1 Broadway Center, 8th Floor,
Schenectady, NY 12305

APPENDIX C continued...

Response Form

1. Do you make a conscious effort to address issues of self-esteem in your teaching? (**If your answer is no, please go to #5)

2. Is this focus on self-esteem primary to your teaching?

3. How long have you focused on self-esteem as a component of your teaching?

4. What kinds of things do you do in this effort?

5. How do you feel about the growing focus on the issue of self-esteem in education at large?

6. I will be interviewing teachers to learn more about the growing phenomenon of a focus on self-esteem in the profession of teaching. Would you consider participating in my research as an interviewee?

   If yes: Name:
   Best time and place for me to call you:
   Phone number:
   Grade that you teach:
   School:

Thank you very much for your time. If you indicated that you might consider being interviewed, I will contact you within two weeks of my receipt of your letter.

Again, thanks,

Ronna Tulgan

APPENDIX D

WRITTEN CONSENT FORM

I, Ronna Tulgan, am a doctoral student in the School of Education, at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, MA. I am researching the experience of teachers who have made an effort to include self-esteem in their teaching mission, for my doctoral dissertation. I will interview teachers to learn about their experience. I hope this research will lend insight to the dynamics of the effort of teaching to improve self-esteem.

I am requesting your participation in this study. I will conduct three, 1 1/2 hour in-depth interviews with each participant. The first interview will center around the question of how you came to teach with a focus on self-esteem, the second interview will focus on what it's like to teach with a focus on self-esteem, and the third interview will explore what it means to you to teach with a focus on self-esteem. While these questions will provide the structure of the interview, my intent in the interviews will not be to seek particular answers to these questions but rather to stimulate discussion of your stories and recreation of your experiences within the framework these questions establish.

These interviews will be audio-taped and later transcribed by a secretary. My goal is to analyze "your story" to learn more about the dynamics of your experience and the phenomenon of teaching for improved self-esteem. I will use the interview material including extensive direct quotes, in my dissertation. I may also use the interview transcripts for later professional publications and verbal presentations. I will never use your name, the name of other people in your stories, or the name of your school in any presentation of your interviews.

While consenting at this time to participate in these interviews, you may at any time withdraw from the actual interview process.

continued on back...

APPENDIX D continued...

Furthermore, while having consented to participate in the interview process and having so done, you may withdraw your consent to have specific excerpts from your interviews used in any printed materials or oral presentations if you notify me within thirty days of your final interview.

In signing this form you are agreeing to the use of the materials from your interviews as indicated in this consent form. If I were to want to use the materials from your interviews in any ways not consistent with what is stated, I would contact you to get your additional written consent.

In signing this form, you are also assuring me that you will make no financial claims on me for the use of the material in your interviews.

Finally, in signing this you are thus stating that no medical treatment will be required by you from the University of Massachusetts should any physical injury result from participating in these interviews.

- -

I, _____,
have read the above statement and agree to participate as an interviewee under the conditions stated above.

_____
Signature of participant

_____
Date

_____
Interviewer

APPENDIX E

PARTICIPANT POPULATION

1) Karen V., pre-k teacher; inner-city school; has focused on self-esteem on her own initiative midway through her career; supplements focus with a particular self-esteem curriculum; has been teaching for about 11 years.

2) Walt G., k. teacher; inner-city school; has focused on self-esteem on his own initiative throughout his career; supplements focus with a particular self-esteem curriculum; has been teaching for about 20 years.

3) Ellen B., 1st-grade teacher; city school, right near the suburbs; has focused on self-esteem on her own initiative throughout her career; uses bits and pieces of different curricula; has been teaching for about 25 years.

4) Colleen D., 1st-grade teacher; rural school; has focused on self-esteem on her own initiative for the past two years; does not use a curriculum; has been teaching for 18 years.

5) Pat P., 2nd-grade teacher; suburban school; works in a school that has developed a general philosophy of self-esteem; doesn't use a curriculum; has been teaching for about 15 years.

6) Fran H., 2nd-grade teacher; rural school; works in a school that had adopted a self-esteem curriculum two years ago; has been teaching for 8 years.

7) Judy S., 2nd-grade teacher; suburban school; works in a school that has developed a general philosophy of self-esteem; has been teaching for about 35 years.

8) Pam G., 3rd-grade teacher; inner-city school; focuses on self-esteem on her own initiative; doesn't use any particular curriculum; has been teaching for about 20 years.

continued...

APPENDIX E continued...

9) Joyce F., 3rd-grade teacher; suburban school; works in school that has developed a general philosophy of self-esteem; has been teaching for about 25 years.

10) Cathy M., 3rd-grade teacher; inner-city school; works in a school that has implemented a self-esteem curriculum this past year, Cathy was a leader in bringing the curriculum into the school; has been teaching for about 25 years.

11) Anne K., 4th-grade teacher; urban school; has focused on self-esteem on her own initiative for the past six or so years; uses a particular self-esteem curriculum; has been teaching for about 20 years.

12) Jane W., 4th grade-teacher; suburban school; works in a school that supports a focus on self-esteem; has been teaching for about 16 years.

13) Erin F., 5th-grade teacher; rural school; has always focused on self-esteem and works in a school that has adopted a self-esteem curriculum; has been teaching for about 20 years.

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